



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



MONDAY — 1 Nov 2021

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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	11/01 Thailand, Australia, Israel ease travel curbs
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/thailand-australia-ease-international-border-curbs-spurred-by-pandemic-2021-11-01/
GIST	<p>BANGKOK/SYDNEY, Nov 1 (Reuters) - Thailand, Australia and Israel eased international border restrictions significantly on Monday for the first time in 18 months, offering a broad test of demand for travel worldwide amid the coronavirus pandemic.</p> <p>The relaxation contrasts with tightening lockdowns elsewhere, notably in eastern Europe where infections have hit record numbers, and in parts of China, which has taken a zero-tolerance approach to the pandemic despite relatively few cases.</p> <p>Hundreds of vaccinated foreign tourists arrived in the Thai capital for quarantine-free travel after the Southeast Asian nation approved visitors from more than 60 countries, including China and the United States.</p> <p>Several European nations are also on the list as Thailand, one of Asia's most popular destinations, looks to capitalise on northern hemisphere visitors keen to escape the winter blues.</p> <p>Those hopes appeared to pay off early, with German tourist Simon Raithel and a group of friends among the first to arrive.</p> <p>"Right now, in Europe, it's quite cold," said Raithel, 41, who planned to head to islands in the Thai south. "We just picked this flight and it is quite surprising that we are the first flight to arrive."</p> <p>In Sydney, hundreds of citizens were greeted by family and friends as they became the first to arrive from abroad without a permit or the need to quarantine since April 2020.</p> <p>"(It's a) little bit scary and exciting," said Ethan Carter, who flew in from Los Angeles. "I've come home to see my mum 'cause she's not well."</p> <p>While travel is initially limited to just a few states and to Australian citizens, permanent residents and their immediate families and New Zealand nationals, it heralds a plan to re-open to international tourists and workers, both much needed to reinvigorate a fatigued nation.</p> <p>Australia's announcement of quarantine-free travel for Singapore citizens from Nov. 21 was a step forward to "a new normal", said Philip Goh, the Asia-Pacific vice president of airline trade body IATA.</p> <p>"We are excited by this positive development and we look forward to further easing of border restrictions by Australia and other countries in the region," Goh said.</p> <p>'WE MISSED YOU GUYS'</p> <p>Israel also relaxed travel rules on Monday but tourists should read the fine print before booking.</p> <p>"Welcome to Israel," the government said in a tweet next to a big blue heart. "We missed you guys."</p>

Individual tourists are allowed in if they have received COVID-19 vaccine boosters - but not if more than six months have lapsed since their last dose, with some exceptions.

That has tempered excitement among hoteliers.

"How many tourists out in the world have actually gotten boosters or are sitting in that six-month period following their second dose?" Israel Hotel Association CEO Yael Danieli said in the days leading up to the relaxation.

"Even if both parents in a family are vaccinated, their children under 12 are not, so they mostly can't come to Israel."

Members of tour groups are exempted from the six-month rule but will have to take PCR or antigen tests every 72 hours for the first two weeks of their stay.

Despite the eased curbs, world travel in full swing is a long way off.

China's tourism sector is suffering from the country's zero tolerance for COVID-19 as cities with infections, or even with concerns about infections, close entertainment venues, restrict travel or delay cultural events. Shanghai Disneyland stopped admitting visitors on Monday.

The Russian capital brought in its strictest lockdown measures in more than a year on Thursday as nationwide one-day pandemic deaths and infections hit new highs. read more The Ukrainian capital of Kyiv has tightened restrictions due to a spike in infections.

Eastern Europe as a whole is grappling with its worst outbreak since the pandemic started.

Britain on Monday removed the last seven countries on its coronavirus "red list", which required newly arrived travellers to spend 10 days in hotel quarantine.

The United States will lift international travel restrictions for fully vaccinated travellers on Nov. 8.

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HEADLINE	11/01 Yemen: Houthi missiles kill 10
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/lifestyle-religion-middle-east-yemen-sanaa-a17254fa48a15ce7b14c978e46a5efb9
GIST	<p>SANAA, Yemen (AP) — At least 10 civilians were killed and 25 wounded when two ballistic missiles from Yemen's Houthi rebels struck a religious educational facility in the central province of Marib, officials said Monday.</p> <p>The missiles hit Dar al-Hadith - a religious school and a mosque - in the residential neighborhood of al-Aumd late Sunday and the casualties included women and children, they said.</p> <p>The attack also damaged nearby houses, said the officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief media.</p> <p>There was no immediate comment from the Iranian-backed Houthis, who have attempted for months to take oil-rich Marib to complete their control over the northern half of Yemen.</p> <p>Yemen has been engulfed in a civil war since 2014, when the Houthis captured the capital, Sanaa, and forced President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi and his internationally recognized government to flee to the south, and then later to Saudi Arabia.</p> <p>A Saudi-led coalition entered the war the next year to try restore the government to power. The war has deteriorated largely into a stalemate and spawned the world's worst humanitarian crisis.</p>

	<p>The facility includes a religious school and a mosque attended by about 1,200 Muslim students from across the country. Most of the students and teachers left the area last month as the Houthis made progress in their offensive on Marib.</p> <p>Moammar al-Iryani, information minister of the internationally recognized government, said the casualties included women and children.</p> <p>“This horrific massacre comes after a series of systematic killings of civilians that the terrorist Houthi militia committed in the past few days” in the government-held cities of Marib and Taiz, he said.</p> <p>A Houthi ballistic missile struck the house of a key tribal leader in al-Aumd on Thursday, killing at least 11 civilians and wounding 16 others.</p> <p>On Saturday, the Houthis shelled the residential Camp neighborhood on the outskirts of the government-held city of Taiz, killing at least three children from the same family. At least six other children were wounded, according to al-Iryani.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/01 Key rebel leader killed in Philippines
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/key-rebel-leader-in-philippines-killed-in-decades-old-fight/
GIST	<p>MANILA, Philippines (AP) — Philippines forces have killed a key rebel commander in one of Asia’s longest-running insurgencies, in what the military described as a daring raid in the country’s remote southern region, but what guerrilla leaders claimed was an ambush.</p> <p>Jorge Madlos, who used the nom de guerre Ka Oris, was for many decades a leading figure and spokesman for the communist fighters in the southern Philippines’s mountainous hinterlands.</p> <p>Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana on Monday said government forces killed Madlos in the Bukidnon province on Saturday. He described the rebel’s death as a major blow to the already-battered New People’s Army guerrilla group.</p> <p>Regional military commander Maj. Gen. Romeo Brawner said villagers tipped off the military about the presence of about 30 rebels, who were holding discussions with residents in a far-flung village near Impasug-ong town. Fighter planes were deployed to fire rockets on the rebel positions, which the military said was protected by land mines, before a ground assault was ordered.</p> <p>After a gunbattle that raged for less than an hour, troops found the bodies of the 72-year-old Madlos and his medical aide, their assault rifles and ammunition, Brawner said.</p> <p>“Justice has been served for those innocent civilians and their communities he terrorized for several decades,” Brawner told reporters.</p> <p>The guerrillas, however, said in a statement posted on a website linked with the group that the long-ailing Madlos was traveling with a rebel medic on a motorcycle to get medical treatment when government forces gunned them down. The rebels said both Madlos and his companion were unarmed and added that no military airstrike or gunbattle took place.</p> <p>Military commanders have blamed Madlos and his forces for years of deadly assaults against security forces, as well as attacks on mining companies, pineapple and other agricultural plantations to extort money, or what the guerrillas call “revolutionary taxes,” from local and foreign-owned businesses.</p> <p>Madlos was blamed by the military for helping to plot a 2011 attack by more than 200 guerrillas on three nickel mining complexes in southern Surigao del Norte province where the rebels ransacked the site after disarming guards and holding several employees at gunpoint. One of the companies that came under</p>

attack, the country's biggest nickel producer partly owned by Japan's Sumitomo Corp., was forced to temporarily halt operations following the raid.

Madlos was a student activist, who quit university and went underground after then-Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in 1972. Distinguished by his trademark Mao-style cap, goatee and folksy manners, Madlos stuck it out with the insurgency even after falling ill more than a decade ago. In an interview with The Associated Press in 2010 from a rebel mountain camp in the south, he said that only one thing could make him leave his comrades.

"Our retirement comes in death," Madlos said then.

The military says there remains about 3,500 to 4,000 communist fighters despite years of rebel setbacks, surrenders and factionalism. Peace talks brokered by Norway collapsed between President Rodrigo Duterte's administration and the guerrillas after both sides accused each other of renewed deadly attacks.

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HEADLINE	10/31 Worldwide Covid deaths rise; cases drop
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2021/10/31/world-cornavirus-india-deaths-surge-cases-down/1611635694678/
GIST	<p>Oct. 31 (UPI) -- Coronavirus deaths surged in India to 560 daily in the past week after the outbreak was mitigated to under 200 fatalities from world-high fatalities this summer though cases remain relatively low with around 12,000 daily.</p> <p>Worldwide deaths rose 2% as the toll passed 5 million last week and was 5,014,779 as of the close of Sunday, according to Worldometers.info. Johns Hopkins puts the death total at 4,999,486.</p> <p>In the past week, fatalities rose 83% to 3,918, which is third behind the United States with 7,950 and Russia with 7,852 but ahead of Ukraine with 3,907. On Sunday, India reported 446 deaths for a total of 458,186 in third place behind the United States with 766,247 and Brazil with 607,764.</p> <p>Previous daily increases in India were 549 Saturday, 733 Friday and 805 Thursday. Until last week, deaths hadn't exceeded 500 since September. That included a low of 146 two weeks ago.</p> <p>In June there were a world record 6,148 deaths in one day.</p> <p>India also holds the cases record of 414,188 in May. Since then cases are way down, including 12,830 Sunday and 14,313 Saturday for a total of 34,273,300, which is second behind the United States with 46,813,971 but ahead of Brazil with 21,804,094.</p> <p>For the week, India's cases dropped 9% with 97,834, which is 13,912 per day. Worldwide, cases rose 1% last week and so far Sunday it's 247,285,055.</p> <p>Cases have been below 30,000 for 36 consecutive days and 50,000 for 125.</p> <p>India, which is the prime manufacturer of vaccines for the world, has been ramping up inoculations. The Asian nation's one-shot rate for the entire population is 53.3%,</p> <p>Worldwide, vaccination doses grew by 160 million in one week to 7,000,149,453 with the world's population of 7.9 billion, according to tracking by Bloomberg. Elsewhere in the world, the United States is at 66.5% with Mainland China at 82.5%.</p> <p>India has administered more than 1 billion doses to its citizens, which is second behind China with 2.3 billion with the United States at 419.0 million.</p>

India's Prime Minister [Narendra Modi said Saturday](#) at the [G20](#) summit in Rome that his nation is ready to produce 5 billion vaccine doses by the end of 2022.

A new strain of the highly contagious Delta variant, called AY.4.2, has been detected in India as well as Britain, Israel, the United States and Russia.

"An increase in AY.4.2 sequence submissions has been observed since July," the World Health Organization said in its [weekly epidemiological update](#) on Tuesday.

Despite the rise in deaths, states have already begun lifting restrictions for celebrations and festivities on Thursday.

Schools in Kerala, in southwestern India, are to [reopen Monday](#) in a staggered manner after having been closed for more than a year in the state of 34.6 million people.

Meanwhile, a ban on international commercial passenger flights to and from India extended until [Nov. 30](#).

Asia's 79,331,860 cases ranked first among the continents but they decreased 7% in the past week. And deaths are second at 1,171,001, increasing 20%.

Like India, Indonesia's daily deaths and cases are also a fraction from a few months ago.

Indonesia ranks seventh in the world at 143,405 with an increase of 17, way down from a record 2,069 on July 27. The Asian nation's cases are 14th at 4,244,358, including 523 Sunday, also way below the record 54,000 in July. Indonesia has vaccinated 44.1% of its population with at least one dose.

Iran is 11th at 126,303, including 177 Sunday. Iran's one-shot vaccination rate is 62.7%, up from 60.1% one week ago and three weeks ago 43.6%.

Turkey is sixth in the world for cases at 8,032,988, including 23,948 reported Sunday and 18th in deaths at 70,611, including 201 most recently. Turkey has a 66.6% vaccination rate.

Japan reported 229 cases, less than 1% of the record of 25,492 on Aug. 21 after the Summer Olympics ended on Aug. 8. And deaths were up seven for a total of 18,212.

Japan, which ended its state of emergency on Oct. 1, has a relatively low 13,673 infections per million and 145 deaths per million. Worldwide, it's 31,703 cases per million and 642.8 per million deaths. The United States' figures are 2,297 fatalities per million and 140,296 infections per million.

Japan, which didn't administer its first vaccine doses until February, has vaccinated 77.4% of the population. Japan plans to allow [booster shots](#) for anyone who has received two vaccination doses, which contrasts with the situation in other nations, including the United States.

"The decline has puzzled most Japanese experts in public health and in COVID," Mike Toole, an epidemiologist at the Burnet Institute in Melbourne, [told ABC news in Australia](#). "You can't explain the decline in Japan only through vaccinations because 30% of a country of more than 100 million people are not vaccinated so there's plenty of room for the virus to spread."

The pandemic began in late 2019 in Mainland China, but the nation's death toll has stood at 4,636 for several months and 80th behind Zimbabwe at 4,675. China added 78 cases Sunday.

China has kept the [spread minimal](#) with masks compulsory, mass testing in the area near a reported infection and detailed contact tracing. And there are mandatory quarantines on entry, including up to 21 days.

An additional 1.5 million Moderna vaccine doses donated by the United States will arrive in Taiwan on Monday, the American Institute in Taiwan [announced Sunday](#). In all, the United States has donated 4 million.

Taiwan's vaccination rate is 71.8%.

South Korea's cases rose 2,061 Sunday after a record 3,273 on Sept. 25. The nation has 2,849 deaths, including 19 more Sunday.

South Korea's vaccination rate is 79.5%, after getting off to a late start like Japan.

Israel has a death toll of 8,100 with nine reported Sunday, and 271 cases most recently with the record 20,523 Sept. 1. Israel has among the world's worst infection rates: 142,335 per million.

The nation's one-shot vaccination rate is 68.8%. And booster shots are required for travelers and entry to public spaces for those 12 and older.

An [Israeli study](#) found booster shots 92% effective at preventing serious illness compared to those who received only two doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

Israel and Turkey are among 18 non-European Union nations that participate in the [27-nation EU vaccine certificate program](#), meaning people who have been fully vaccinated can visit other member countries, including England, without needing to quarantine. Each nation can implement restrictions.

Europe is the only continent with an increase in deaths, at 15%, with a total of 1,302,347 and cases 12% at 64,511,437. The fatalities are the most of the continents with cases second behind Asia.

These increases have been fueled by a record increase in Eastern Europe: Russia, Ukraine and Romania.

Russia's deaths rose 9% in one week with a record 1,158 Sunday for a total of 238,538 in sixth place. Ukraine was up 27% and is in 19th with 67,729, including 336 Sunday and a record 734 Tuesday. Romania rose 8% and is 20th at 47,751, including 394 Sunday and a record 561 Oct. 21.

Also, Poland was up 72% but only nine on Sunday at 17th with 76,999.

Russia has exceeded 1,000 deaths every day since Oct. 16. Also, Russia has recorded at least 900 fatalities for 26 days in a row and hasn't been below 700 since July.

Last year, deaths reached 635 on Dec. 24.

In cases, Russia rose 8% for a total of 8,513,790 in fifth place with a record 40,993 Sunday, the third time in the past four days it was more 40,000.

On Thursday, Russia's capital, Moscow, entered a 10-day partial lockdown. The rest of Russia braced for a series of [COVID-19](#) restrictions.

In Moscow, unvaccinated seniors must stay at home over the next four months. Schools and businesses are closed.

"If they keep us shut for months like the last lockdown, we're done for," Anna Alekseeva, 25, who works at a small craft beer bar, [told NPR](#). "This isn't Europe or America. The government here doesn't care about small business at all."

Russia has vaccinated 37.2% of its population with at least one dose of a domestic-produced vaccine, including Sputnik 5.

"These are intelligent people with a good education. I can't understand what's going on," President Vladimir Putin said recently. "We have a reliable and efficient vaccine. I want to emphasize again, there are only two choices: get sick or get vaccinated."

Two other Eastern European nations have low vaccination rates: Ukraine at 30.2% and Romania at 33.4%. Poland's rate is 54.9%.

Coronavirus is not just spiking on the continent in Eastern Europe.

Britain reported the most cases on the continent in the past week, 281,940, and second in the world though it was a 13% decrease, for a total of 9,057,629 in fourth place. On Sunday, 38,009 were reported with 51,427 Oct. 21, behind the record 67,775 in January when the Delta variant was peaking there.

Britain's weekly deaths increased 14% at 1,099 with 74 reported Sunday and in eighth globally with 140,632. On Tuesday, 263 fatalities were reported, the most since March. The record was 1,824 in January.

Prime Minister [Boris Johnson](#) stressed the need for those eligible to get boosters shots, including those 50 and older and those with clinical vulnerabilities at least six months after their second dose. The one-shot rate is 74.7%.

"We're watching the numbers every day," Johnson [told reporters](#) before the G20 summit in Rome. "Yes it's true that cases are high, but they do not currently constitute any reason to go to plan B. I think it's agreed among absolutely everybody, apart from possibly the Labour party. So we're sticking with the plan."

Asked if he could guarantee a good Christmas, Johnson replied: "I see no evidence whatever to think that any kind of lockdown is on the cards."

On July 19's "freedom day," virtually all of England's restrictions were lifted, including required mask-wearing.

Other European nations have instituted passes that require proof of vaccination or a negative test to visit bars and restaurants or work in several fields, including healthcare.

In the European Union, the one-shot vaccination rate is 69.4%, including 81.8% in Spain, 78.9% in France, 77.2% in Italy, 69.5% in Germany.

In deaths, Italy is ninth with 132,100, including 26 Sunday. In the top 20: France is 12th with 117,683, an increase of 12; Germany 14th with 96,259 and 25; Spain 16th with 87,368 and no data on weekends.

Those nations had much fewer cases than Britain most recently: France 6,329, Germany 13,912, Italy 4,526 and Spain 2,261 (Friday).

In North America, the deaths are 1,148,069 with a 20% weekly drop, and cases are 56,246,491, decreasing 16%.

The United States' deaths decreased 25% and cases 15%. On Sunday, the United States reported 162 deaths and 19,975 cases though most states don't report data on weekends.

Mexico is fourth in the world in deaths at 288,276 with a 3% weekly increase and 325 recorded Saturday. The nation's cases dropped 8% with 3,478 most recently for 15th at 3,805,765

Canada ranks 26th worldwide in deaths with 28,968, including four on Sunday, and 27th in cases with 1,714,414, including 1,109 most recently. Canada's deaths record is 257 on Dec. 29 and the cases mark is 11,383 on Jan. 3.

Canada has around one-third the rates per million than the United States with deaths 759 and cases 44,896.

Canada has the best one-shot vaccination rate of the three largest countries in North America at 78.9%. The United States is at 66.5% for one shot. Mexico's percentage is 55.9%, though it was the first Latin American nation to begin vaccinating people.

On Nov. 8, the United States will allow entry to fully vaccinated foreign travelers from 33 nations, including by air and land, if they'd spent any of the previous 14 days in several countries. They also must have a negative COVID-19 test no more than three days prior to departure.

Canada earlier ended its advisory against non-essential travel for vaccinated citizens. Canada reopened its border to vaccinated Americans in August.

[Last Monday](#), Mexico City began vaccinating adolescents 12-17 with chronic diseases.

Mexico City is deemed a green-risk state on the [stoplight system](#), among 29 states, including prime tourist destination Yucatan remains yellow. Baja California remains orange with Aguascalientes and Guanajuato yellow.

In South America, cases decreased 1% with a total of 38,419,616 and deaths were down 6% to 1,170,733.

Brazil's deaths decreased 8% to 607,860, which is second in the world, and 5% in cases to 21,810,855, which ranks third. Brazil reported 96 deaths and 6,761 cases Sunday.

Brazil's Senate recommended charges against humanity for "obvious disregard" for people's lives and other charges for President [Jair Bolsonaro](#) over his handling of the pandemic. [Last week](#), the report has been handed to Prosecutor-General Augusto Aras, who was appointed by President Jair Bolsonaro.

Bolsonaro, who contracted the virus and has refused to be vaccinated, has dismissed the virus as like the flu.

Also in the top 10 for deaths: Peru is sixth at 200,246 and Colombia 10th at 127,281. Argentina is 13th with 115,950 deaths and Chile 22nd with 37,757.

On Sunday, Chile reported 14 more deaths, Peru 29, Colombia 23 and Argentina eight. These numbers are way down from records: Peru with 1,154, Colombia with 754, Argentina with 791, Chile with 316.

Chile has the highest vaccination rate on the continent at 85.3% with Brazil at 75.8%, Argentina 75.5%, Colombia at 59.1% and Peru 56.4%.

Latin America is at 62% with at least one shot, according to [New York Times tracking](#). The United States and Canada are at 68% with Europe at 59%, Asia-Pacific 58%, Middle East 43% and Africa 8.5%.

Africa has 16.72% of the world's population but its share of vaccinations is 2.7% at 191 million doses.

Specifically, South Africa has vaccinated just 25% of its population with at least one shot.

Although vaccine doses have increased into Africa, the continent is facing a shortage of syringes, WHO said.

"Early next year, COVID-19 vaccines will start pouring into Africa, but a scarcity of syringes could paralyze progress," Matshidiso Moeti, the WHO regional director for Africa, [posted on Twitter](#).

In the continent, deaths dropped 15% for the week with a total of 218,761 and cases also were down 8% at 8,572,901.

South Africa is 15th in the world with 89,177 deaths, including 14 Sunday. And cases rose 230 most recently.

Tunisia has the second-most deaths with 25,241 ahead of Egypt with 18,651.

Oceania, with only 42.3 million people, has 3,716 deaths with a decrease of 10% in seven days, or 143, and cases are 310,375, up more than 15,400 with a drop of 21%.

New Zealand's deaths remained 28 after rising by one from three weeks ago. Australia's toll increased to 1,735, with 13 reported Sunday and 100 in a week.

New Zealand added 143 cases Sunday with Saturday's 160 a record. Australia was up 1,103 with a record 2,688 reached Oct. 14.

In August, New Zealand Prime Minister [Jacinda Ardern](#) ordered a nationwide lockdown after a single case, the country's first in six months. Restrictions are [set to end](#) once 90% of those 12 and older have been fully vaccinated, which is projected for later this month.

Australia has a vaccination rate of 74.9% with New Zealand at 75% among the entire population.

Victoria, which includes Melbourne, ended its lockdown Thursday, a day ahead of schedule, with 80% full vaccination reached among those 18 and older. Melbourne has been in lockdown since July. Masks will no longer be mandatory in outdoor settings where social distancing is possible. Also, entertainment and retail venues can re-open.

"At 6 o'clock, we'll be able to celebrate the success, get back to normal: a big step, a really big step," Victoria Premier Daniel Andrews [said Thursday morning](#). "Victorians have achieved an amazing thing and it's them I'm focused on."

On Oct. 11, New South Wales, which includes Sydney, was no longer declared a hotspot after confirmation of the state's 80% double vaccination dose. It had that designation on Aug. 14.

[On Sunday](#), the state reported 177 locally acquired cases, the lowest in three months. It was 1,036 in Victoria.

Fiji, with a 69.2% vaccinated rate, has 674 deaths, adding 11 in one week. On May 3, there were four fatalities. Cases have climbed from 121 on May 3 to 52,141. Fiji has 903,457 residents.

Guam, a territory of the United States with fewer than 200,000 residents, has 238 11 in a week, and 18,187, including 36 most recently. Its vaccination rate is 79.7% for the entire population, including 93.3% of those eligible, which is 12 and older, and interestingly fewer adults at 91.4, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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HEADLINE	11/01 France president: Australia PM lied
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/frances-macron-says-australia-pm-lied-him-submarine-deal-2021-10-31/
GIST	<p>SYDNEY, Nov 1 (Reuters) - French President Emmanuel Macron said Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison lied to him over the cancellation of a submarine building contract in September, and indicated more efforts were required to rebuild trust between the two allies.</p> <p>In Rome for the G20 summit, the two leaders were meeting for first time since Australia scrapped the multi-billion dollar deal with France as part of a new security alliance with Britain and the United States unveiled in September. read more</p>

The alliance, dubbed AUKUS, which could give Australia access to nuclear-powered submarines, caught Paris off guard, prompting it to recall ambassadors from Washington and Canberra amid accusations that France had been betrayed.

"I don't think, I know," Macron said in response to a question whether he thought that Morrison had lied to him

"I have a lot of respect for your country," he said in comments on Sunday to a group of Australian reporters who had travelled to Italy for the summit of leaders of the top 20 economies.

"I have a lot of respect and a lot of friendship for your people. I just say when we have respect, you have to be true and you have to behave in line, and consistently, with this value."

Morrison told a media conference later the same day that he had not lied, and had previously explained to Macron that conventional submarines would no longer meet Australia's needs. The process of repairing ties had begun, he added.

Morrison and Macron spoke last week before the Australian prime minister publicly sought a handshake with his French counterpart at the G20 meeting.

On Monday, Australian Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce urged France to view the matter in perspective.

"We didn't steal an island, we didn't deface the Eiffel Tower. It was a contract," Joyce told reporters in Moree, 644 km(400 miles) northwest of Sydney.

"Contracts have terms and conditions, and one of those terms and conditions and propositions is that you might get out of the contract."

Joyce spoke just hours before Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne met France's ambassador to Canberra. Payne said their hour-long meeting focused on efforts to repair the relationship.

On Friday, U.S. President Joe Biden said the handling of the new pact had been clumsy, adding that he had thought France had been informed of the contract cancellation before the pact was announced.

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HEADLINE	11/01 Britain to France: back down or face trouble
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-warns-france-back-down-48-hours-or-face-trade-trouble-2021-11-01/
GIST	<p>LONDON, Nov 1 (Reuters) - Britain gave France 48 hours on Monday to back down in a fishing row that threatens to spiral into a wider trade dispute between two of Europe's biggest economies or face tortuous legal action under the Brexit trade deal.</p> <p>Post-Brexit bickering over fish culminated last Wednesday in the French seizure of a British scallop dredger, the Cornelis Gert Jan, in French waters near Le Havre. Paris has threatened sanctions from Nov. 2 that could snarl cross-Channel trade.</p> <p>The measures could include increased border and sanitary checks on goods from Britain and banning British vessels from some French ports.</p> <p>"The French have made completely unreasonable threats, including to the Channel Islands and to our fishing industry, and they need to withdraw those threats or else we will use the mechanisms of our trade agreement with the EU to take action," British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss told Sky News.</p>

"The French have behaved unfairly. It's not within the terms of the trade deal. And if somebody behaves unfairly in a trade deal, you're entitled to take action against them and seek some compensatory measures. And that is what we will do if the French don't back down," Truss said.

Asked over what time frame France should back down, Truss said: "This issue needs to be resolved in the next 48 hours."

DEADLOCK

Britain and France have bickered for decades over the rich fishing grounds around their northern coasts but a fresh row erupted in September after Paris accused London of failing to allocate enough licences to French boats to fish in the zone 6-12 nautical miles from UK shores.

Britain says it is issuing licences to vessels that can prove they have previously fished in its waters - a key demand from British fishermen who fear French boats could wipe out their own profits.

French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson discussed the fishing spat on Sunday on the sidelines of a Group of 20 summit in Rome, but failed to narrow their differences.

Johnson said he had been "puzzled" to read a [letter](#) from Paris to the European Union. Sent by French Prime Minister Jean Castex, it called on the bloc to demonstrate there was "more damage to leaving the EU than to remaining there".

Relations between London and Paris have become increasingly strained since Britain voted to leave the EU in 2016. London's recently struck security pact with the United States and Australia did little to rebuild trust with Paris.

The dispute also risks distracting from Britain's hosting of the United Nations COP26 climate talks that have now started in Glasgow

Pressed on Monday on why the fishing issue had again soured bilateral ties, Truss suggested it might have something to do with next year's presidential election in France.

While fishing accounts for just a tiny fraction of Europe's second and third largest economies, it is of vital importance to coastal communities in both Britain and France who say their way of life is threatened by foreign fishermen.

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HEADLINE	11/01 Pentagon rattled by China's military push
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/technology-china-asia-united-states-beijing-aea288656fab23253ee0397dc21ba68a
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — China's growing military muscle and its drive to end America predominance in the Asia-Pacific is rattling the U.S. defense establishment. American officials see trouble quickly accumulating on multiple fronts — Beijing's expanding nuclear arsenal, its advances in space, cyber and missile technologies, and threats to Taiwan.</p> <p>"The pace at which China is moving is stunning," says Gen. John Hyten, the No. 2-ranking U.S. military officer, who previously commanded U.S. nuclear forces and oversaw Air Force space operations.</p> <p>At stake is a potential shift in the global balance of power that has favored the United States for decades. A realignment more favorable to China does not pose a direct threat to the United States but could complicate U.S. alliances in Asia. New signs of how the Pentagon intends to deal with the China challenge may emerge in coming weeks from Biden administration policy reviews on nuclear weapons, global troop basing and overall defense strategy.</p>

For now, officials marvel at how Beijing is marshaling the resources, technology and political will to make rapid gains — so rapid that the Biden administration is attempting to reorient all aspects of U.S. foreign and defense policy.

The latest example of surprising speed was China's test of a hypersonic weapon capable of partially orbiting Earth before reentering the atmosphere and gliding on a maneuverable path to its target. The weapon system's design is meant to evade U.S. missile defenses, and although Beijing insisted it was testing a reusable space vehicle, not a missile, the test appeared to have startled U.S. officials.

Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the test was "very close" to being a Sputnik moment, akin to the 1957 launching by the Soviet Union of the world's first space satellite, which caught the world by surprise and fed fears the United States had fallen behind technologically. What followed was a nuclear arms and space race that ultimately bankrupted the Soviet Union.

Milley and other U.S. officials have declined to discuss details of the Chinese test, saying they are secret. He called it "very concerning" for the United States but added that problems posed by China's military modernization run far deeper.

"That's just one weapon system," he said in a Bloomberg Television interview. "The Chinese military capabilities are much greater than that. They're expanding rapidly in space, in cyber and then in the traditional domains of land, sea and air."

On the nuclear front, private satellite imagery in recent months has revealed large additions of launch silos that suggest the possibility that China plans to increase its fleet of land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles, or ICBMs.

Hans Kristensen, a nuclear weapons expert at the Federation of American Scientists, says China appears to have about 250 ICBM silos under construction, which he says is more than 10 times the number in operation today. The U.S. military, by comparison, has 400 active ICBM silos and 50 in reserve.

Pentagon officials and defense hawks on Capitol Hill point to China's modernization as a key justification for rebuilding the U.S. nuclear arsenal, a project expected to cost more than \$1 billion over 30 years, including sustainment costs.

Fiona Cunningham, an assistant professor of political science at the University of Pennsylvania and a specialist in Chinese military strategy, says a key driver of Beijing's nuclear push is its concerns about U.S. intentions.

"I don't think China's nuclear modernization is giving it a capability to pre-emptively strike the U.S. nuclear arsenal, and that was a really important generator of competition during the Cold War," Cunningham said in an online forum sponsored by Georgetown University. "But what it does do is to limit the effectiveness of U.S. attempts to pre-emptively strike the Chinese arsenal."

Some analysts fear Washington will worry its way into an arms race with Beijing, frustrated at being unable to draw the Chinese into security talks. Congress also is increasingly focused on China and supports a spending boost for space and cyber operations and hypersonic technologies. There is a push, for example, to put money in the next defense budget to arm guided-missile submarines with hypersonic weapons, a plan initiated by the Trump administration.

For decades, the United States tracked China's increased defense investment and worried that Beijing was aiming to become a global power. But for at least the last 20 years, Washington was focused more on countering al-Qaida and other terrorist threats in Iraq and Afghanistan. That began to change during the Trump administration, which in 2018 formally elevated China to the top of the list of defense priorities, along with Russia, replacing terrorism as the No. 1 threat.

For now, Russia remains a bigger strategic threat to the United States because its nuclear arsenal far outnumbers China's. But Milley and others say Beijing is a bigger long-term worry because its economic strength far exceeds that of Russia, and it is rapidly pouring resources into military modernization.

At the current pace of China's military investment and achievement, Beijing "will surpass Russia and the United States" in overall military power in coming years "if we don't do something to change it," said Hyten, who is retiring in November after two years as vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "It will happen."

The Biden administration says it is determined to compete effectively with China, banking on a network of allies in Asia and beyond that are a potential source of strength that Beijing cannot match. That was central to the reasoning behind a Biden decision to share highly sensitive nuclear propulsion technologies with Australia, enabling it to acquire a fleet of conventionally armed submarines to counter China. Although this was a boost for Australia, it was a devastating blow to Washington's oldest ally, France, which saw its \$66 billion submarine sale to Australia scuttled in the process.

Taiwan is another big worry. Senior U.S. military officers have been warning this year that China is probably accelerating its timetable for capturing control of Taiwan, the island democracy widely seen as the most likely trigger for a potentially catastrophic U.S.-China war.

The United States has long pledged to help Taiwan defend itself, but it has deliberately left unclear how far it would go in response to a Chinese attack. President Joe Biden appeared to abandon that ambiguity when he said Oct. 21 that America would come to Taiwan's defense if it were attacked by China.

"We have a commitment to do that," Biden said. The White House later said he was not changing U.S. policy, which does not support Taiwanese independence but is committed to providing defensive arms.

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HEADLINE	11/01 Prisons face staff shortages over Covid
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-business-health-texas-prisons-dba13f1c6368392be2bc5e7375170a78
GIST	<p>At a Georgia state House of Representatives hearing on prison conditions in September, a corrections officer called in to testify, interrupting his shift to tell lawmakers how dire conditions had become.</p> <p>On a "good day," he told lawmakers, he had maybe six or seven officers to supervise roughly 1,200 people. He said he had recently been assigned to look after 400 prisoners by himself. There weren't enough nurses to provide medical care.</p> <p>"All the officers ... absolutely despise working there," said the officer, who didn't give his name for fear of retaliation.</p> <p>In Texas, Lance Lowry quit after 20 years as a corrections officer to become a long-haul trucker because he couldn't bear the job any longer. Watching friends and coworkers die from COVID-19, along with dwindling support from his superiors, wore on him.</p> <p>"I would have liked to stay till I was 50," said Lowry, 48. "but the pandemic changed that."</p> <p>Staff shortages have long been a challenge for prison agencies, given the low pay and grueling nature of the work. But the coronavirus pandemic — and its impact on the labor market — has pushed many corrections systems into crisis. Officers are retiring and quitting in droves, while officials struggle to recruit new employees. And some prisons whose prisoner populations dropped during the pandemic have seen their numbers rise again, exacerbating the problem.</p>

There is no one thing pushing prison employees out in high numbers now. Some are leaving for new opportunities as more places are hiring. University of Michigan economist Betsey Stevenson pointed to the increased risk of COVID-19 for people working in prisons.

“When jobs become riskier, it becomes harder to attract workers,” she wrote in an email. “By failing to protect prisoners from COVID, the criminal justice system not only created an unfair risk of severe illness and death for the incarcerated, but the increased COVID risk to employees has undoubtedly contributed to staffing shortages.”

Unions representing prison officers in states including Massachusetts and California and at the federal level also claim vaccine mandates will drive out unvaccinated employees and exacerbate understaffing, though it’s unclear how big of an impact those rules will have.

“There are dozens of reasons to leave and very few to stay,” said Brian Dawe, national director of One Voice United, a nonprofit supporting corrections officers. “Understaffing, poor pay, poor benefits, horrendous working conditions. ... Officers and their families in many jurisdictions have had enough.”

Employers from construction companies to restaurants are having difficulty hiring and keeping people. Nearly 3% of American workers, 4.3 million, quit their jobs in August, according to new data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

But the stakes are higher in prisons, where having fewer guards means significantly more dangerous conditions for incarcerated people. And for the officers left behind, worsening shortages have made an already difficult job unbearable, many say.

In Georgia, some prisons report up to 70% vacancy rates. In Nebraska, overtime hours have quadrupled since 2010, as fewer officers are forced to work longer hours. Florida has temporarily closed three prisons out of more than 140 facilities because of understaffing, and vacancy rates have nearly doubled there in the last year. And at federal prisons across the country, guards are picketing in front of their facilities over understaffing, while everyone from prison teachers to dentists is pulled in to cover security shifts.

In recent weeks, reporters from The Marshall Project and The Associated Press have spoken with workers, officials, attorneys and people incarcerated in more than a dozen prison systems to understand the consequences of the staffing shortfalls.

The federal Bureau of Prisons says about 93% of its front-line guard positions are filled, with little more than 1,000 vacancies, though workers in many prisons say they’re feeling the pinch as others are conscripted to fill in for missing officers.

Asked last week in a U.S. Senate hearing about federal prison staffing, Attorney General Merrick Garland said, “I agree this is a serious problem at the Bureau of Prisons.”

Garland told the Senate Judiciary Committee that Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco was working with the bureau to address staffing issues.

In Kansas, state Department of Corrections Secretary Jeff Zmuda testified before the legislature that the problems now are unlike any he’s seen in his career. Kansas has more than 400 unfilled jobs for uniformed officers, a number he expects to grow in the coming months as workers are lured by other employers that pay better.

Quitting can have a snowball effect, said Doug Koebernick, inspector general of the Nebraska correctional system. “People leave, then that creates more overtime and stress and more vacancies,” he said. “It’s like this spiral.” Many corrections officers said they were forced to work more overtime as fewer people showed up for shifts. In Texas, guards have worked as much as 16-hour days.

Inside prisons, growing shortages mean a rise in lockdowns. Restrictions that might have begun as a way to stop the spread of COVID-19 have continued because there aren't enough guards to supervise activities. Some incarcerated people say they can't take classes, participate in group therapy sessions or even work out in the recreation yard or take a shower. That can force those in general population into de facto solitary confinement, and those already in segregation into near-total lockdown.

"If we get rec once a week, that's a good week," said Anthony Haynes, who is on Texas' death row in a unit that is barely half-staffed. "We don't always get showers."

A spokesman for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice did not respond to Haynes' claims but acknowledged that staffing is a challenge in Texas' prisons.

"Before COVID-19, staffing was frequently impacted by economic surges and competing employment opportunities," said spokesman Robert Hurst in an email. "The pandemic has exacerbated these issues. We also recognize that the job of the correctional officer is one of the most difficult in all of state government." He added that Texas has closed six of its more than 100 facilities in the last year due to staffing problems.

Kansas has cut job training and reduced supervision for people after they're released. Two-thirds of the men in Nebraska's prisons can't see visitors on the weekends — when most families are free to travel — because of understaffing.

The constant isolation takes a toll. "As of October, we have not had yard for two weeks," wrote one man at Illinois' Pontiac Correctional Center, where officials report 35% of corrections officer jobs are vacant. (His testimony was compiled by lawyers suing the state prison system over a dearth of mental health care.) "I feel very overwhelmed ... I can't talk about my problems to anyone. I pace back and forth and talk to myself because there's nothing else to do."

Mental health care is dwindling, prisoners and lawyers argue, as people in prison grow more desperate. In Illinois, canceled one-on-one therapy means what little counseling is available happens briefly through a cell door, in full earshot of the rest of the tier, said attorney Alan Mills of the Uptown People's Law Center, which has sued the state corrections department over inadequate mental and physical health care, due in large part to a lack of qualified staff.

A spokeswoman for the Illinois Department of Corrections said that Pontiac continues to provide out-of-cell programming and one-on-one counseling. "While staffing challenges have had an impact on scheduling, the department is committed to delivering the highest quality mental and medical health care as possible," said Lindsey Hess in an email.

Officials from corrections departments in Georgia and Washington, where the governor halted the transfer of people from county jails to prisons for two weeks due to staffing changes, did not respond to requests for comment.

Dr. Homer Venters, a former chief medical officer for the jail system in New York City, inspects conditions in prisons around the country for court cases. Understaffing will lead to an increase in preventable prison deaths, he said, as the quality of care reaches new lows.

"Things are much worse behind bars now than they have been for a long time," Venters said. "There are so many staff that have left. That means that basic clinical services, like getting to scheduled appointments, just isn't happening the way it was even five years ago."

Violence is also on the rise in some prisons. The Southern Center for Human Rights recently sued the Georgia Department of Corrections over lockdowns and dangerous conditions: There were 48 suspected homicides in the state's prisons between January 2020 and August 2021 and 38 suicides. (In 2017, in comparison, there were eight homicides.) Hundreds of people incarcerated at three state prisons rioted last summer, after being locked in their cells for weeks and monitored by as few as six guards at a time.

	<p>In July, the state had a 56% annual turnover rate for corrections officers, and 40% of those jobs were vacant, according to department documents. The U.S. Justice Department announced an investigation into the corrections department in September, citing understaffing as a primary concern.</p> <p>Meanwhile, corrections departments say they are trying harder than ever to recruit new staff. They've boosted social media posts and in-person job fairs. In Indiana, they raised the starting pay for corrections officers a dollar to to \$19 an hour. Others are giving perks like hiring bonuses, better pay at critical units, earlier pay raises or, in Kansas, extra time off for current employees who refer new hires.</p> <p>But some hurriedly hired cadets might not last long.</p> <p>Brandon Robert Graham started training at the Walla Walla State Penitentiary in Washington in August 2020 and within two weeks was on the tier. "They were in such a hiring crisis that I was a 'rapid hire,'" he said. At first, he was excited about the salary and "great benefits" compared with other jobs in the area. But as more entry-level jobs opened up, he started looking elsewhere.</p> <p>"I was on night shift. I never got to see my fiancée," he said. "I did so much overtime that I thought I was getting sick from the stress."</p> <p>He left in July to look for a new job.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/01 Shanghai Disneyland sudden lockdown
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-lifestyle-business-china-shanghai-e1bd1d7d07a670f9dca2bfd69dc99386
GIST	<p>TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Fireworks boomed as visitors at Shanghai Disneyland waited for COVID-19 test results, surrounded by health care workers dressed from head to toe in white protective suits.</p> <p>Shanghai Disneyland announced suddenly Sunday evening that it was no longer accepting any new visitors and was cooperating with an epidemiological investigation from another province. They then locked down the park as Shanghai city healthcare workers and police rushed to conduct a mass testing of the visitors already inside.</p> <p>After testing everyone, the park will remain shut on Monday and Tuesday as it continues to cooperate with pandemic prevention efforts, Shanghai Disneyland said in a statement Monday.</p> <p>The park's sudden lockdown and temporary closure underscored just how serious China is about enforcing its zero-tolerance pandemic prevention strategy.</p> <p>Globally, many countries have turned to living with the virus, whether out of choice or necessity, although as virus surges come and go, many face overburdened health care systems and additional deaths.</p> <p>In China, which has kept its borders sealed since March 2020, the response has been to cut the chain of transmission of the virus as quickly as possible. With a strict quarantine-on-arrival policy, the authorities have aimed to stamp out each local outbreak to zero — helping China keep its reported totals to 4,636 deaths and 97,243 cases since the pandemic began.</p> <p>The case that may have prompted Disneyland's actions involved one person whose illness was discovered in the nearby city of Hangzhou and had visited the theme park on Saturday, local media reported.</p> <p>For hours on Sunday night, tens of thousands of families and visitors were stuck in the park as they waited for a negative test result that would allow them to leave.</p>

	<p>The city announced Monday morning that all 33,863 people who had been at the park over the weekend had tested negative for COVID-19. They will be asked to get tested again and their health will be monitored.</p> <p>One Disney fan, who gave her family name as Chen, said she was inside the park when she heard an announcement at 5 p.m. that everyone must get tested.</p> <p>“No one complained, and everyone behaved really well,” Chen said. She said she holds an annual membership and visits the park at least once a month. She is waiting at a hotel for her second COVID-19 test before she can go back to Beijing.</p> <p>Shanghai Disneyland is just the latest example of how far Chinese authorities will go to stop the spread of the virus.</p> <p>Last Thursday, Beijing Railway authorities told health authorities in Jinan to stop a train that was traveling from Shanghai to Beijing because one passenger was a close contact of someone who had tested positive for COVID-19.</p> <p>Jinan health authorities then sent health care workers, transportation workers and police rushing to the station to quarantine the passengers and disinfect the train. They sent 212 people into centralized quarantine, including the close contact.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/31 CDC struggles with confusing messaging
SOURCE	https://www.yahoo.com/news/cdc-messaging-coronavirus-masks-vaccines-boosters-212616596.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — On Oct. 22, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top medical adviser to President Biden, sat for a CNN interview that touched on coronavirus booster shots. The host of the program, John Berman, asked Fauci if people should seek out booster shots of the same brand of vaccine they’d initially received.</p> <p>“It’s generally recommended that you get the booster that is the original regimen that you got in the first place,” Fauci said. He conceded that mixing different types of vaccines was allowable but reiterated that brand loyalty was best.</p> <p>About two hours after that interview aired, the White House pandemic response team held a briefing for the press. A reporter asked Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the same question about mixing vaccines. “We will not articulate a preference,” Walensky said, seeming to contradict what Fauci had just said on CNN.</p> <p>He had, in fact, added that there was no danger in mixing vaccine types, but a casual observer might have been led to believe that the federal government didn’t know its own plan. “I’ve been a nurse for 40 years and I am confused,” Donna Gallipeau wrote that day on Twitter, describing how she had gone into a Publix supermarket for a booster, only to be turned away.</p> <p>The disconnect between Fauci and Walensky was a minor matter. But critics say that the CDC has struggled to communicate clearly to the American people the fine points of late-stage pandemic policy, in particular when it comes to mask guidance and the need for booster shots.</p> <p>“It is a challenge — and can be challenging — to communicate clearly,” a CDC official conceded to Yahoo News, speaking on the condition of anonymity in order to express what the official described as their own views on the pandemic. “I think we tried our best to address the nuance,” the official added.</p> <p>There has been marked improvement in consistency, to be sure. President Biden does not routinely contradict the CDC as Donald Trump did in unpredictable press briefings and interviews. At the same time, plenty of disagreements remain, each one of them a potential land mine for the CDC: Are booster shots even necessary? If boosters are necessary, how does that effort square with the ongoing push for</p>

millions to get their initial vaccine jabs? What about masks for fully vaccinated people? For that matter, what does fully vaccinated mean, now that some people have been boosted?

Aside from these specific questions is a broader one that, some believe, needs to be frankly addressed: Is the [pandemic becoming endemic](#), or will we be in a state of high emergency for many months to come? That is, are we finally near the end?

These questions play out in full view, at press briefings, on cable news and during Zoom meetings of advisory boards. And though the CDC is only one of several agencies involved in pandemic decision making, it is the one tasked with translating scientific research for the public, making sense of the inevitable scientific ambiguity or inconclusiveness.

The CDC is failing in that regard, critics say. The headline of a New York Times opinion essay by Zeynep Tufekci, a University of North Carolina sociologist who has gained a large following for her coronavirus-related observations, [put the matter bluntly](#): “The C.D.C. Needs to Stop Confusing the Public.”

A lot of the confusion began with [a July 4 outbreak in Provincetown, Mass.](#), that seemed to suggest that the Delta variant was rapidly proliferating across the United States and had a greater ability to infect vaccinated people than previously thought. In response to Provincetown, Walensky reinstituted an indoor masking guidance, which the CDC [had lifted](#) in mid-May. Now even the vaccinated [were advised to wear masks indoors again](#). The CDC reimposed a guidance for masking in schools, as well.

Walensky and other top public health officials labored to remind a newly frightened populace that the vaccines remained exceptionally effective, at both preventing infection in the first place and keeping people out of the hospital. “As we look at our hospitalizations and as we look at our deaths, they are overwhelmingly unvaccinated people,” Walensky said during [an Aug. 5 press briefing](#).

Yet the Delta outbreak required that high-vaccination communities return to the kinds of measures they’d been taking before the availability of vaccines. A CDC public affairs officer told Yahoo News that the agency stood by “a layered prevention strategy, including vaccination and mask wearing in areas of substantial and high community transmission. These measures, which we often talk about in tandem and as complementary, are proven to slow the spread of the virus.”

Pro-Trump personalities in conservative media outlets seized on the return of indoor masking in late July to argue that the medical establishment had exaggerated the efficacy of coronavirus vaccines. Many of these anchors and hosts have never forgiven public health officials for the initial reversal on masks in the early days of the pandemic, when masking went abruptly from unnecessary to mandatory, with little explanation accompanying the change.

“There’s still an awful lot we don’t know. These are, after all, experimental drugs, and they’re behaving like it,” Tucker Carlson of Fox News said in [a monologue rife with exaggerations and untruths](#). “The bottom line is that a huge number of vaccinated people are getting COVID, and some of them are getting very sick, even dying.”

In fact, very few people die from COVID-19 after having been vaccinated. “We put vaccines on a pedestal,” the CDC official acknowledges. “They are not going to prevent every single infection.”

Former Baltimore Health Commissioner Leana Wen told Yahoo News in an email that “it would be helpful if the CDC can specify what conditions masks are no longer needed — for example, if everyone in a workplace or school is vaccinated and tested, or if everyone is vaccinated and the community transmission is below a certain level.”

Wen added that doing so would “set expectations for employers and school administrators, assist families and friends who want to get together safely and add an additional incentive for vaccination.”

By the end of the summer, there was not only Delta to contend with but increasing worries that vaccine protection was waning, necessitating booster shots for people who had received their second doses in early 2021. Those worries were compounded by [a spike in Israel](#), which had been the first nation in the world to vaccinate its population in early 2021. Now its vaccine firewall appeared to be petering out.

“The time to lay out a plan for COVID-19 boosters is now,” [said](#) Surgeon General Vivek Murthy in mid-August. “Recent data makes clear that protection against mild and moderate disease has decreased over time.”

Some federal regulators disagreed, with two top scientists at the Food and Drug Administration resigning over what they described as pressure over [approving boosters for the general population](#), an action they felt the science — to which the Biden administration had vowed unfailing adherence — did not justify.

Eventually, a key CDC advisory panel said that only immunocompromised people and those over the age of 65 should receive booster shots — only to be overruled by Walensky, who said that some people exposed to elevated risk by their occupations should also be eligible.

Some medical experts argued that it was wrong to shift the government’s focus away from the unvaccinated — [who continued to account for the vast majority of new infections](#) — to those who had been vaccinated but might want or need the protection afforded by a third shot (or, in the case of the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine, a second one). The booster talk muddles the conversation, these critics charge.

“We have a really effective vaccine, and it is like saying that it is not working, and it is working,” the Ohio State pediatrician Pablo J. Sanchez [said during the booster debate](#).

In a statement to Yahoo News, the CDC public affairs officer said that the agency’s “recent recommendations on boosters has not distracted from the critical work of ensuring that unvaccinated people take the first step and get an initial COVID-19 vaccine.”

At the heart of the debate is the question of just how close we are to the end of the pandemic. Whereas the full return to normal life seemed close in May, it seems impossibly distant now. Asked [in mid-October](#) if the nation were “turning the corner” on the Delta surge, Walensky both acknowledged and downplayed the drop in infection rates, hospitalizations and deaths.

“We absolutely need to stay focused on continuing to get COVID under control around the country, especially as we head into the fall and winter season — respiratory virus season,” Walensky said, sounding very much as if it were the winter of 2020, not the fall of 2021.

The White House no longer discusses [needing to hit a specific vaccination benchmark](#), despite touting such benchmarks for much of the spring and early summer. The talk of a [“pandemic of the unvaccinated”](#) has also subsided, despite that still being an accurate, if bracing, framing of the current state of affairs.

Vaccinated people may benefit from booster shots, but the nation would benefit as a whole if the unvaccinated people got their first shot. Walensky knows this, of course, but her powers as a public health official are limited. Many of the vaccine holdouts are in pro-Trump areas of the country, where some conservatives refuse to acknowledge Biden’s legitimacy as president. The White House can’t write them off, but it also can’t persuade them. Resistance to coronavirus vaccines has become a core part of many people’s political identity.

The intractability of that divide helps explain why vaccinated people are still wearing masks. Some continue to do so outside, presumably as a show of how seriously they still take the pandemic. And yet more than 60 million eligible Americans have not been vaccinated at all. Reaching them is urgent, but difficult.

[Dr. Vinay Prasad](#), a University of California at San Francisco oncologist who has emerged as a widely followed pandemic contrarian, believes that boosters and masks distract from the sole factor that will help end the pandemic: first-time vaccinations. “Everything else is diminishing returns,” Prasad told Yahoo News in a recent interview.

“I find their messaging, and their strategy, problematic and even to some degree self-defeating,” Prasad said of the CDC’s approach, which he argues fails to address the main challenges at this stage of the pandemic.

Walensky had been inching towards the goal of returning to normal throughout May and June. The feeling of [“impending doom”](#) she had expressed in March waned as vaccination rates rose throughout the spring.

June saw COVID-19 deaths per day dip [below 300](#) for the first time in a year. “We were all hopeful that either things would settle into a low simmer or really kind of peter out,” the CDC official said.

Then came Delta.

By the time Walensky reinstituted the mask mandate, many vaccinated Americans had been ready to get on with their lives, only to be yanked back into a state of emergency. At the same time, Republican governors in Florida, Texas and other states mounted a new campaign against masks and vaccines, reviving culture wars that had appeared to be receding only weeks before. Some Republican governors and state legislators worked to ban local governments from implementing mask and vaccine mandates meant to blunt Delta’s spread.

“We are in a perfect storm of viral changes and behavioral changes,” University of Texas biologist Lauren Ancel Meyers [told the Washington Post](#) in the first week of September, as daily deaths jumped back up to 1,500, the grim but predictable result of a wave centered on the Southeast and lower Midwest, where the Delta variant raged without evident hindrance, helped along by low vaccination rates, lack of mask mandates and, in some cases, the rise of misinformation.

Inside the CDC, there is a feeling of exhaustion and exasperation, both with an unpredictable pandemic and the persistent stream of misinformation, much of it coming from conservative media, that has frustrated attempts at clarity, nuance and flexibility.

“Everything is just really loaded,” the CDC official said. “Everybody’s tired of this.”

Even as the Delta variant subsides, Walensky has made no suggestion that mask guidances will be revised, at least on the federal level. She has made clear that the CDC will continue to recommend masking in schools, too, even as children between the ages of 5 and 11 stand to receive their inoculations in November.

“We are acting like it was before we had vaccines,” said Dr. Monica Gandhi, an infectious disease expert at the University of California at San Francisco, in an interview with Yahoo News.

Walensky has said she is worried about the arrival of colder weather, which could lead to yet another spike in cases as people spend more time indoors and gather for winter holidays. It may simply be easier to stay the course than to keep revising CDC guidance. “Look at the U.K,” said Dr. Kavita Patel, referencing a surge [now building across the United Kingdom](#). “She does not want that,” Patel said of Walensky.

The danger is that people will conclude that nothing will change, which will give them little incentive to follow guidance, whether for masking, vaccination or other measures, like indoor occupancy limits.

In a late October cable news appearance, Walensky did allow that Halloween would be safe this year. “Put on those costumes, stay outside and enjoy your trick-or-treating,” she said. This time, her message echoed neatly what Fauci had said in mid-October: [“Go out there and enjoy Halloween,”](#) he said, adding that vaccinations would make the holiday even safer.

	Maybe it wasn't much, but it was still progress.
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HEADLINE	10/31 L.A. Co. sheriff warns of 'mass exodus'
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/crime/sheriff-warns-vaccine-mandate-causing-mass-exodus-among-personnel/ar-AAQ9XHX
GIST	<p>Los Angeles County Sheriff Alex Villanueva continues to rail against the county's vaccine mandate, warning it is causing a "mass exodus" in his department and threatens public safety at a time when violent crime is on the rise.</p> <p>"I have repeatedly stated the dangers to public safety when 20%-30% of my workforce is no longer available to provide service, and those dangers are quickly becoming a reality," Villanueva said in a prepared statement that he posted on social media last week. "We are experiencing an increase in unscheduled retirements, worker compensation claims, employees quitting, and a reduction in qualified applicants."</p> <p>As a result, he said, homicide rates in the county would continue to rise, while response times increase and patrol services decline.</p> <p>"With the pandemic waning, there is no justification for the Board mandate," Villanueva said. "It is like putting up the storm windows after the storm has passed."</p> <p>Under an executive order ratified by the Board of Supervisors in August, all Los Angeles County employees were required to register their vaccination status by Oct. 1 on an online portal, though religious and medical exceptions are allowed.</p> <p>As of Friday, more than 90% of the county's employees, including 79% of sheriff's department workers, had registered their status, Michael Wilson, a county spokesman, said in an emailed statement to The Times. He did not say whether the county is tracking how many employees have resigned or retired early specifically over the vaccine mandate.</p> <p>"The county expects all department heads to encourage their employees to register as an important public health measure to protect workers and the public we serve," Wilson said. "The vaccination policy is intended to save lives, not to punish employees based on their vaccination status."</p> <p>More than half of the sheriff's department's 16,084 employees are fully vaccinated, according to preliminary data collected by the county. Nearly 300 are semi-vaccinated. Another 2,327 employees are not vaccinated, while 1,843 are seeking exemptions.</p> <p>Of the sheriff's 9,656 sworn personnel, 3,942 are fully vaccinated, according to county records. There are 188 workers who are semi-vaccinated, while 1,698 are not vaccinated and nearly 1,369 are seeking exemptions.</p> <p>Of the department's 6,428 civilian employees, 4,238 are fully vaccinated, according to county data. About 100 are semi-vaccinated and 629 are not vaccinated. Another 474 workers are seeking exemptions.</p> <p>Notices are being sent out in batches to county employees who have not complied with the vaccination policy, Wilson said. The notice lets them know they must comply with the mandate within 45 days of receiving note.</p> <p>After that time, employees who still have not shown their proof of vaccination or sought an exemption will get a five-day suspension, Wilson said. Employees then have 30 days once they return from their suspension to comply.</p>

Employees who fail to register are being reminded they must do so and begin testing within five days of the notice or face discipline, Wilson said.

"It is our hope that 100% of our workforce will comply with the policy and register in the system, and that those who wish to seek accommodations will take full advantage of the process that has been put in place for them to do so," Wilson said.

Los Angeles County is one of several jurisdictions across the state requiring employees to get vaccinated. The move prompted one police union — the Los Angeles Sheriff's Professional Assn., composed of about 1,850 members — to take legal action over the vaccination registration. The union is seeking a temporary restraining order.

Meanwhile, groups of Los Angeles [police officers](#) and [firefighters](#) have filed lawsuits against the city, alleging its vaccination mandate violates their rights and ignores the protection some of them enjoy from antibodies obtained through previous COVID-19 infection. The City Council voted last week to extend the deadline to Dec. 18 for city workers to show proof of vaccination or face disciplinary action.

The LAPD has seen more than 3,000 employees fall ill from COVID-19, and as of last week had more than 100 personnel at home recovering, said LAPD Chief Michel Moore. About 74% of LAPD employees have had at least one dose of a vaccine, he said.

But recent data showed that hundreds of officers still have not told the department whether they are vaccinated.

The county's vaccination mandate came as the state grappled with a surge of coronavirus cases triggered by the emergence of the highly infectious [Delta variant](#).

In recent weeks, the number of weekly coronavirus cases and hospitalizations across the state [plateaued](#) and the transmission rate has been among the lowest in the country. Officials hope vaccine requirements and other safety rules will help prevent another spike in cases and deaths this winter, particularly during the holiday season.

In his statement addressed to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, Villanueva noted that his department personnel already wear masks and submit to regular COVID-19 testing.

"Personally, I am vaccinated and believe the vaccine works," he said, "but the choice to receive the vaccine is a personal one, and an individual who served the community tirelessly before there was a vaccine should not now be fired because they made a decision about their body."

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HEADLINE	10/31 Trouble? Holiday shopping sticker shock
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2021/10/31/business/economy-holiday-shopping-prices/index.html
GIST	<p>New York (CNN Business)You've probably noticed that prices have gone up on groceries, essentials, home appliances, fast food and all sorts of consumer goods. Inflation is at more than a decade-long high.</p> <p>That means 2021 will be among the most expensive holiday shopping seasons ever. But shoppers aren't holding back just yet. Companies are confident you'll keep paying higher prices, especially during the holidays.</p> <p>They'd better be right: If consumers get sticker shock and decide to pull back spending, the US economy could be in big trouble.</p> <p>It's the economy, stupid!</p> <p>Despite a global supply chain crisis, a resurgence of Covid cases and high inflation, America's economy remains in pretty decent shape. Consumers aren't spending as much as they did in the spring, when they still</p>

had gobs of money to blow from their stimulus checks, but they continue to open up their wallets — albeit for some smaller purchases.

Consumer spending rose a healthy 0.6% in September after growing 1% in August, the Bureau of Economic Analysis reported Friday. But the report came with some red flags: Large, durable goods purchases (think cars and appliances) were down 0.2%, while spending on other, nondurable items surged 0.9% — mostly because food and gas prices are on the rise.

Albertsons and other chains expect they can get consumers to pay higher prices without much resistance.

That suggests consumers are willing to keep spending, even while prices increase. But they could be holding back on some bigger-ticket items.

The good news is the Delta variant seems to be on the downslide, at least for now. Consumers could start venturing out again toward the end of the year if the trend continues. And automakers are reporting some easing of the supply chain crisis that has seriously crunched inventory — which could help car prices come down a bit and lead to some robust end-of-year purchases, perhaps some luxury cars with bows on their tops for holiday gifts.

If we're in for a December to remember, though, consumers are going to have to keep dealing with higher prices.

A merry Christmas for stores

Economists and retail chains are confident that consumers will keep spending during the holidays.

With [higher wages](#) and a lot of jobs waiting to be filled, Americans have money to spend this Christmas — even if prices are higher.

"As the Delta wave recedes, consumer spending is turning higher, with the latest data showing increased hotel occupancy and restaurant visits," said BMO senior economist Sal Guatieri.

People are returning to work, and pay keeps rising along with inflation. They've built up savings over the pandemic, too, which will give shoppers and stores a tailwind going into the holidays, according to Guatieri.

"Holiday sales look to be very strong this year...if stores can find enough workers to deliver them," he said.

Retail sales in November and December are expected grow between 8.5% and 10.5% this year compared with the 2020 holiday season, to a record of up to \$859 billion, the National Retail Federation, a trade group for retailers, said Wednesday. The figure excludes car dealers, gas stations and restaurants.

"Everything we hear from the consumer that we talk to on a regular basis is they're excited about the holiday season," Target CEO Brian Cornell said in an [interview](#) with Yahoo Finance Monday. "We certainly expect to see a very strong and robust holiday season."

However, supply chain challenges remain a huge factor that could derail the holiday season. Even Amazon and Apple are [grappling with the global supply chain crunch](#).

Both companies reported revenue results on Thursday that fell short of Wall Street analysts' expectations and warned that supply chain issues could weigh on business in the December quarter.

Shipping delays means those supply and demand scales will continue to be in imbalance. As your Econ 101 professor told you, that means prices will keep rising, right through the end of the year.

Higher prices 'well received by customers'

Yet companies are also confident that, with supply tight and demand red hot, they have pricing power over customers and can pass along the soaring costs they're facing to customers.

"Consumers are paying higher prices because there are limited opportunities to purchase other goods," said Gus Faucher, chief economist at PNC. "If your dishwasher breaks and you need a new one, and dishwashers are in short supply, you're willing to pay a premium. Same with household products like cleaners, toothpaste, or toys. That's allowing businesses to raise prices."

Procter & Gamble ([PG](#)), Whirlpool ([WHR](#)), Coca-Cola ([KO](#)), McDonald's ([MCD](#)) and Albertsons have said in recent days that customers aren't changing their buying habits, even as prices increase. They believe consumers are in good financial shape and can afford to pay higher prices without too much resistance.

"We have not seen a material change in customer behavior. And I think it speaks to the strength of the customer," Albertsons CEO Vivek Sankaran said on an earnings call earlier this month. "We don't see their intent changing dramatically over the next several weeks and months."

McDonald's [raised menu prices](#) 6% recently, and the chain's chief financial officer Kevin Ozan said on an earnings call Wednesday that the increase "has been pretty well received by customers."

But there are dangers to companies and the broader economy if prices rise too much, as some customers may punish them by trading down to lower-cost products or reducing their spending. Brands can also suffer if they make err on pricing. In 2019, when Clorox ([CLX](#)) raised prices on Glad trash bags, retailers [revolted and reduced space for Glad](#) on the shelves, squeezing sales.

"If inflation persists at a high level and that is stronger than wage growth, that would cause consumers to be more cautious with their spending," said PNC's Faucher. "They have to eat out less and go to the movies less. Instead of buying steak, they're going to buy ground beef."

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HEADLINE	11/01 China isolated as Asia nations live w/Covid
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2021/10/31/asia/china-japan-south-korea-covid-intl-dst-hnk/index.html
GIST	<p>Hong Kong (CNN)From Australia to South Korea and across Asia Pacific, the final bastions of "zero-Covid" are easing restrictions and opening borders as the region prepares to live with the virus -- except for one major holdout.</p> <p>China, the country where Covid-19 was first detected nearly two years ago, remains determined to eliminate the virus inside its borders, with officials there showing no signs of backing down.</p> <p>Despite fully vaccinating more than 75% of its population, China is sticking to its stringent zero-Covid strategy, including closed borders, lengthy quarantine measures for all international arrivals and local lockdowns when an outbreak occurs.</p> <p>On Tuesday, the northwestern city of Lanzhou, with a population of more than 4 million people, went into lockdown after just six new daily Covid-19 cases were reported there. To date, Lanzhou has recorded 68 cases attached to the newest outbreak.</p> <p>And this approach seems set to stay, at least for now. Even though some Chinese health officials have suggested a tentative or partial relaxation once vaccination rates hit 85%, analysts say most restrictions are unlikely to ease within the next 12-months.</p> <p>In China's Asia Pacific neighbors, however, things couldn't be more different.</p> <p>From Monday, South Korea will begin to live with the virus despite thousands of new confirmed cases every week. New measures will allow up to 10 people to meet in private gatherings across the country, while most businesses will be permitted to fully reopen as curfews end.</p>

And in [Japan's capital Tokyo](#), curfews were lifted for bars and restaurants at the end of last month, despite hundreds of new cases across the country every day.

And it's not just domestic restrictions that are lifting around the region.

While both Japan and South Korea continue to maintain strict border controls, including quarantines for most international arrivals, from Monday Thailand will [welcome visitors from 63 countries](#), as long as they can prove they are fully vaccinated and have tested negative for Covid-19.

And on Monday, Australia also begins to partially reopen its borders to citizens who are fully vaccinated, ending a strict border regime that has separated families for almost two years.

Much of this is thanks to generally high vaccination rates across Asia Pacific. Despite a slow start to their rollouts, countries including Australia, Japan, South Korea and [Singapore](#) are now among the most vaccinated in the world per capita.

South Korea's return to 'normal life'

South Korea was one of the first countries to suffer a major outbreak of Covid-19, seeing hundreds of cases a day as early as March 2020.

It had early success bringing infections under control, as did many other Asia Pacific countries. While Europe and North America suffered major outbreaks in 2020, nations including South Korea, China, Thailand and Australia managed to keep the virus at manageable levels -- or kept it out for long periods of time.

But outbreaks of the highly infectious Delta variant in mid-2021 have [sent cases soaring](#) across the region and led almost all countries to focus on a move to vaccinations and living with the virus, rather than elimination.

"With the Delta variant, it's almost impossible to eradicate," Zhengming Chen, a professor of epidemiology at the University of Oxford, said. "The experience in Australia and New Zealand, they tried very hard, but you reach a point where you just can't carry on in the lockdown. It's going to come up again and again."

On Friday, with at least 73% of South Korea's population now fully vaccinated, Prime Minister Kim Bo-kyum said it was time for the country to "take the first step resuming our normal life."

A 10 p.m. curfew on businesses, including restaurants and bars, has been lifted, while mass gatherings of up to 499 people can take place if everyone is vaccinated. All students will head back to school from November 22, according to the Education Ministry.

The removal of restrictions comes despite rising Covid-19 cases over the past week. On Sunday, South Korea reported 1,686 new infections, bringing its total to 366,386 since the pandemic began. To date, 2,858 have died in South Korea from the disease.

Prime Minister Kim said it wasn't the end of the fight against Covid-19, "but a new beginning." The country's health minister also warned there would likely be a rise in infections as a result of reopening.

Other countries in the region are following suit, despite local outbreaks of the virus.

Over the past week Thailand reported an average of nearly 9,000 new Covid-19 infections per day, far higher than the months of single-digit cases during much of 2020. Despite the high infection rates, the country is moving to reopen to international travelers in a bid to save its tourism industry, which accounted for more than 11% of its GDP in 2019, according to Reuters.

From Monday, citizens from dozens of "low-risk" countries, including Australia, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States, can travel to Thailand without needing to quarantine. In a statement on October 12, Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha said the country couldn't afford to miss the December holiday period. "We must act quickly, but still cautiously, and not miss the opportunity to entice some of the year-end and new year holiday season travelers," he said.

Thailand's decision is at least partially reliant on high vaccination rates among inbound tourists. Within Thailand, less than half, or around [42% of the population](#) has received both vaccination doses as of October 28.

For the Asia Pacific region, the emergence from zero-Covid is an experiment to see if populations that previously cherished low infection rates and an elimination strategy can move safely to living with the virus.

Australia's two biggest states, New South Wales and Victoria, have already abandoned the elimination strategy, starting to live with the virus once more than 70% of the adult population was fully vaccinated. So far, infection rates haven't risen, and on Monday, Australia's borders in selected states will reopen to citizens for the first time.

Chen said while cases were certain to rise, vaccination had substantially reduced the severity of Covid-19 for many patients and given countries the window to reopen.

"At some stage you have to open, you have to actually allow the cases to go up but in a manageable way," he said. "You can't just permanent lockdown because the virus is there circulating."

China doubles down on zero-Covid

But China is showing no sign of relaxing its hardline approach to Covid-19.

At present, China's borders are mostly closed, with airline travel severely reduced and foreign students and tourists banned from entry. Chinese citizens and certain other international visitors can enter, but they must quarantine for at least two weeks.

Inside the country, even a small number of cases in a city leads to quick, sweeping lockdowns.

Part of the reason behind China's reluctance to reopen its borders is the upcoming 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, which are due to begin in February. After seeing the chaos and postponements that marked the leadup to the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics, the Chinese government is unlikely to want a repeat.

But the 2022 Winter Olympics isn't the only major event next year that is playing into Beijing's strategy, according to Steven Tsang, director of the SOAS China Institute. In November, the Chinese Communist Party will hold its 20th Congress, a twice a decade mass meeting of the country's leadership where President Xi Jinping is expected to cement a third term in office.

Tsang said Xi didn't want any sign the virus was out of control inside the country before he went to the Congress in November. "How can Xi Jinping appear to have not beaten the virus?" he said. "Xi has been saying the Chinese system is superior."

Xi's political ambitions are one of the reasons the country's strict measures are being drawn out, Tsang said, no matter how much damage they might be doing to places such as [Hong Kong, the global financial hub where strict travel rules are proving extremely unpopular, especially among the city's expatriate workforce](#).

"As a global finance center it needs to have a much more user-friendly entrance system, but the Chinese view, Xi's view, of Hong Kong is that it is a global financial center for China," he said.

Chen, from the University of Oxford, said it was also possible there was uncertainty about the effectiveness of Chinese-developed vaccines among the country's leadership. One of the most commonly used shots, Sinovac, has been shown to have much lower levels of efficacy in international trials than mRNA vaccines, including Pfizer and Moderna.

In addition, he said not a great number of trials were done on senior citizens, potentially leaving them vulnerable in the event of an outbreak.

There have been some minor cracks in the uniform support for China's elimination strategy. Gao Fu, head of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said in October that once the country had fully vaccinated 85% of its population, perhaps in early 2022, it would be [safe to relax restrictions](#).

"Why shouldn't we open up?" he said, according to state-run China Daily.

Chen said it was likely China is watching to see what happens in the rest of the region before deciding what to do about its own borders. If there are few major outbreaks in Asia Pacific nations living with Covid, then maybe Beijing will consider an earlier opening, he said.

"That gives China some confidence to relax," he said.

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HEADLINE	11/01 NYC: 2,000 firefighters take medical leave
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/us/new-york-firefighters-medical-leave-looming-vaccine-sanctions
GIST	<p>At least 2,000 New York City firefighters have taken medical leave this past week, which some officials have labeled a protest as unvaccinated municipal workers in the city face the start of sanctions Monday.</p> <p>"Irresponsible bogus sick leave by some of our members is creating a danger for New Yorkers and their fellow Firefighters. They need to return to work or risk the consequences of their actions," Commissioner Daniel Nigro said over the weekend, according to NBC New York.</p> <p>Thousands of the workers had until 5 p.m. Friday to show proof that they have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. Those who don't get on board will be placed on unpaid leave starting Monday – a scenario that has labor unions warning of staffing shortages.</p> <p>On Saturday, U.S. Rep. Nicole Malliotakis, R-New York said that 26 FDNY stations had closed due to "Mayor [Bill] de Blasio's decision to lock unvaccinated firefighters out of work."</p> <p>"The shortage of potentially thousands of firefighters will undoubtedly result in longer response times, leading to an increased potential for injury or death," Malliotakis added.</p> <p>An official told NBC New York that FDNY members were being shifted around the city due to the sick calls, but Nigro fired back at reports and claims that staffing challenges forced the department to shutter a number of firehouses.</p> <p>"The department has not closed any firehouses," Nigro said, according to the station.</p> <p>The Uniformed Firefighters Association and the Uniformed Fire Officers Association have denied sanctioning a "sickout." UFOA President Jim McCarthy said the union doesn't "condone any job action, nor do we inform anybody to do a job action."</p> <p>As of 5 p.m. Sunday, the FDNY said its vaccination rate for firefighters was at 75% -- with the overall rate for all FDNY members at 80%.</p> <p>De Blasio defended the mandate at a virtual news briefing, saying his job was to keep people, "my employees, and 8.8 million people," safe.</p>

	<p>"And until we defeat COVID, people are not safe. If we don't stop COVID, New Yorkers will die," the mayor added.</p> <p>Over the weekend, the FDNY said that "excessive sick leave" had yet to impact the department's response time.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/31 Supply-chain fixes 'take a little bit of time'
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/gina-raimondo-supply-chain-commerce-secretary-face-the-nation/
GIST	<p><i>Washington</i> — Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo predicted Sunday that it could be some time before supply chain bottlenecks are alleviated, even as the Biden administration works to address the backlogs at ports on the West Coast.</p> <p>In an interview with "Face the Nation," Raimondo said the supply chain issues are temporary, but a "direct result" of the COVID-19 pandemic, as some industries were forced to lay off workers and Americans were told to stay in their homes to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus.</p> <p>"Last year during COVID, we shut our economy down. You know, I was the governor at the time. We shut down Rhode Island's economy. We have never seen that before," she told "Face the Nation." "So that meant factories closed. People went home. You can't just turn the economy back on overnight. So, it takes a little bit of time. I will say we are making progress."</p> <p>To help relieve the disruptions, President Biden announced earlier this month that the Port of Los Angeles would be open around the clock to relieve the congestion there and at the Port of Long Beach. Together, the two ports account for 40% of all shipping containers entering the U.S.</p> <p>Raimondo acknowledged that there are "backups" at the Port of Los Angeles despite the 24/7 operation, and warned "this isn't something that can be fixed overnight."</p> <p>"Fundamentally, supply chains and logistics are run by the private sector. People say to me, 'Will Christmas gifts be delivered?' To which I say, 'Call FedEx,'" she said. "You know, that isn't what the government does. What we are doing, and the president is committed to this, we're using every tool in our toolbox to be supportive, to help to unstick the ports."</p> <p>Many industries are also battling a shortage of semiconductors, or microchips, that are in many electronic devices, including smartphones, cars and appliances. To help address the chip shortage, Mr. Biden included in his \$1.75 trillion social policy and climate framework new incentives to bring manufacturing of semiconductors back to the U.S.</p> <p>"This is a fund that will come to the Department of Commerce. It's a \$52 billion set of incentives to rebuild the domestic supply here," Raimondo said of the so-called advanced manufacturing investment credit. "The day after Congress passes this it can come to us and we can get to work."</p> <p>Raimondo said the Commerce Department is working to incentivize domestic production of semiconductors after much of it was moved to Asia.</p> <p>"We want to make chips in America, so we are incentivizing companies to do that, creating jobs every step of the way," she said, adding that the Biden administration is not mandating domestic production of the semiconductors.</p> <p>Raimondo also rejected the suggestion that implementation of COVID-19 vaccine mandates be pushed back after the holiday season to ensure there are no labor shortages stemming from workers who don't want to comply.</p>

	"It would be a mistake," she said. "You know, this year we're on path to have the strongest GDP growth in decades. We had a blip in the third quarter. Why? Delta variant. The quicker everyone gets vaccinated, the better our economy will be back on track, the quicker everybody gets back to work."
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HEADLINE	10/31 Crucial UN climate summit opens
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/climate-summit-formally-kick-off-glasgow-80885249
GIST	<p>GLASGOW, Scotland -- A crucial U.N. climate summit opened Sunday amid papal appeals for prayers and activists' demands for action, kicking off two weeks of intense diplomatic negotiations by almost 200 countries aimed at slowing intensifying global warming and adapting to the climate damage already underway.</p> <p>As U.N. officials gaveled the climate summit to its formal opening in Glasgow, the heads of the world's leading economies at the close of their own separate talks in Italy made pledges including stopping international financing of dirty-burning coal-fired power plants by next year. But much of the agreement was vague and not the major push some had been hoping for to give momentum to the climate summit.</p> <p>Government leaders face two choices in Glasgow, Patricia Espinosa, head of the U.N. climate office, declared at the summit's opening: They can sharply cut greenhouse gas emissions and help communities and countries survive what is becoming a hotter, harsher world, Espinosa said. "Or we accept that humanity faces a bleak future on this planet."</p> <p>"It is for these reasons and more that we must make progress here in Glasgow," Espinosa said. "We must make it a success."</p> <p>India Logan-Riley, an Indigenous climate activist from New Zealand, had a more blunt message for negotiators and world leaders at the summit's opening ceremony.</p> <p>"Get in line, or get out of the way," Logan-Riley said.</p> <p>But G-20 leaders offered more vague pledges than commitments of firm action, saying they would seek carbon neutrality "by or around mid-century." They also agreed to end public financing for coal-fired power generation abroad, but set no target for phasing out coal domestically — a clear nod to China and India</p> <p>The G-20 countries represent more than three-quarters of the world's climate-damaging emissions and G-20 host Italy and Britain, which is hosting the Glasgow conference, had looked for more ambitious targets coming out of Rome.</p> <p>But major polluters including China and Russia had already made clear they had no immediate intention of following U.S. and European pledges to zero out all fossil-fuel pollution by 2050. Russia said on Sunday that it was sticking to its target of 2060.</p> <p>Speaking to reporters before leaving Rome, U.S. President Joe Biden called it "disappointing" that G-20 members Russia and China "basically didn't show up" with commitments to address the scourge of climate change ahead of the U.N. climate summit.</p> <p>British Prime Minister Boris Johnson struck a grim tone, saying G-20 leaders "inched forward" on curbing global warming, but the goal of limiting temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) -- struck in a landmark deal at the end of the 2015 Paris climate accord -- was in danger of slipping out of reach.</p> <p>"If Glasgow fails then the whole thing fails," Johnson told reporters in Rome. Before leaving Rome, U.S.</p> <p>Some observers said the G-20 pledges were far from enough.</p>

"This weak statement from the G-20 is what happens when developing countries who are bearing the full force of the climate crisis are shut out of the room," said Mohamed Adow, director of Power Shift Africa. "The world's biggest economies comprehensively failed to put climate change on the top of the agenda ahead of COP26 in Glasgow."

While the opening ceremony in Glasgow formally kicked off the talks, known as COP26, the more anticipated launch comes Monday, when leaders from around the world will gather to lay out their countries' efforts to curb emissions from burning coal, gas and oil and deal with the mounting damage from climate change.

The leaders of two of the top climate-polluting nations - China and Russia — were not expected to attend the summit, though seniors officials from those countries planned to participate. Biden, whose country is the world's biggest climate polluter after China, the summit comes at a time when division within his own Democratic party is forcing him to scale back ambitious climate efforts.

At the Vatican Sunday, Pope Francis urged the crowds gathered in St. Peter's Square: "Let us pray so that the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor" is heard by summit participants.

Negotiators will push nations to ratchet up their efforts to keep global temperatures from rising by more than 1.5 degrees Celsius this century compared with pre-industrial times.

The climate summit remains "our last, best hope to keep 1.5 in reach," said Alok Sharma, the British government minister chairing climate talks.

Scientists say the chances of meeting that goal are slowly slipping away. The world has already warmed by more than 1.1C and current projections based on planned emissions cuts over the next decade are for it to hit 2.7C by the year 2100.

The amount of energy unleashed by such planetary warming would melt much of the planet's ice, raise global sea levels and greatly increase the likelihood and intensity of extreme weather, experts say.

U.S. climate envoy John Kerry warned last week of the dramatic impacts that exceeding the 2015 Paris accord's goal will have on nature and people, but expressed optimism that the world is heading in the right direction.

Sharma noted that China, the world's biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, had just raised its climate targets somewhat.

"But of course we expected more," Sharma told the BBC earlier Sunday.

India, the world's third biggest emitter, has yet to follow China, the U.S. and the European Union in setting a target for reaching 'net zero' emissions. Negotiators are hoping India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi will announce such a goal in Glasgow.

Some of the issues being discussed during the talks have been on the agenda for decades, including how rich countries can help poor nations tackle emissions and adapt to a hotter world. The slow pace of action has angered many environmental campaigners, who are expected to stage loud and creative protests during the summit.

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HEADLINE	10/31 Toll: nearly 5M died of Covid-19 worldwide
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nearly-5-million-people-have-died-of-covid-19-since-the-start-of-the-pandemic/
GIST	The coronavirus is on the cusp of having killed at least 5 million people since it first was identified in Wuhan, China, in late 2019, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University.

Nearly a quarter-billion cases of the coronavirus have been reported. Despite the rollout of vaccines, global health experts warn that the pandemic is set to continue.

“With almost 50,000 deaths a week, the pandemic is far from over — and that’s just the reported deaths,” World Health Organization Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said at the World Health Summit in Berlin on Oct. 24.

Vaccines have blunted the worst impact of the pandemic in many countries, though their distribution has been marked by inequities that have contributed to the virus’s spread.

China leads the world in the number of vaccine doses administered, though some other nations have vaccinated a greater share of their population. A number of vaccines were developed and rolled out at record speed, and studies show most have impressive efficacy.

Billions of doses have been administered around the world, far more than the number of confirmed cases of the coronavirus since the start of the pandemic — though a large number of cases were probably never recorded, experts caution.

But the vaccine rollout has faced problems with global supply and pockets of opposition in many nations. COVAX, a program backed by the World Health Organization to fairly distribute vaccines, only belatedly began distributing doses to low-income nations.

“I can’t say it’s surprising,” said Thomas J. Bollyky, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, earlier this year. “In every previous pandemic where we have our global health crisis, where there has been limited supplies of medical intervention, wealthy nations have hoarded.”

The United States continues to have the highest cumulative number of confirmed cases and deaths globally. In early October, the U.S. death toll from covid-19, the disease caused by the virus, surpassed 700,000, despite the widespread availability of vaccines in the country.

Behind the United States, Brazil, India, Mexico and Russia have the largest cumulative numbers of cases.

India’s record-setting surge in spring 2021 meant that the country accounted then for about 1 in 3 of all new confirmed cases. The spike, which was blamed on complacency and the lifting of restrictions, along with the spread of variants, saw the country’s health care system overwhelmed amid widespread oxygen shortages. Even after the surge in new cases subsided in mid-May, India still set records for the number of new daily deaths, with more than 4,500 deaths from covid-19 reported in a single 24-hour period.

In India, as in Britain and Brazil before it, the spread of the virus was blamed on fast-spreading variants rampant in the country, including the delta variant that was first identified in India.

Delta has become the dominant variant in many parts of the world. The variant is more virulent than many others and studies have shown that vaccines do not provide the same levels of protection against it, though they do still significantly reduce the likelihood of serious illness.

Some countries have seen success at controlling the virus — at a price.

In New Zealand, which closed its borders and ordered people to stay home as a first wave hit in the spring of 2020, confirmed that infections went down to zero for a time. Taiwan and Singapore have kept their outbreaks far smaller than those in other parts of the world, which some experts attribute to their early responses and sophisticated tracking and tracing.

China, the early epicenter of the crisis, has seen much of daily life return to normal. In the early months of the outbreak, it reported more cases than any other country. Its tally of new infections peaked in mid-

February of 2020 and approached zero by mid-March of that year, although questions surround the accuracy of its data.

But maintaining these “zero COVID” policies for almost two years has proved difficult. New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said this month that the country would phase out its pursuit of zero coronavirus cases and instead manage the spread of the virus through vaccines and “everyday public health measures” to keep residents safe.

“The Chinese government is keeping a close eye on what is happening overseas to work out whether giving up a ‘zero COVID’ policy requires accepting a spike in cases,” Huang Yanzhong, a senior fellow for global public health at the Council on Foreign Relations, told The Washington Post in October. “That prospect is not acceptable for China.”

Countries that have successfully rolled out vaccines are also seeing gains. Britain, one of the hardest-hit countries in terms of cases and deaths, has excelled in the distribution of vaccine doses. It was the first country to provide a fully tested vaccine to the general public in December, when it began distributing the vaccine developed by Pfizer.

Data released by Public Health England in March suggested that vaccinations had saved over 6,000 lives among people over 70, if not more.

But vaccinations have not ended the pandemic in Britain. Cases have risen since the country dropped its last remaining restrictions in July, despite high levels of vaccination across the country. Some scientists have suggested waning immunity from doses administered in the spring.

Though the WHO has officially called for a moratorium on “booster” shots for those already fully vaccinated, many nations around the world have begun rolling out the shots as official policy for at least part of their population — including the United States.

The new demand from high-income countries for both booster shots and vaccines for children has furthered the competition for doses, often leaving low- and middle-income nations further down the line. The WHO-backed COVAX effort has struggled with supply and funding issues.

Only five African countries out of 54 are expected to hit the target of vaccinating 40% of their population by the end of the year, according to WHO data. Experts say the spread of the virus in countries with little protection from vaccines could lead to more variants and prolong the pandemic.

“Vaccine inequity is not just holding the poorest countries back — it is holding the world back,” Henrietta Fore, executive director of UNICEF, said in a statement released Wednesday.

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HEADLINE	10/31 Covid mandates oust cops nationwide
SOURCE	https://www.chronline.com/stories/covid-mandates-oust-cops-nationwide-police-leaders-warn-of-fallout,276331
GIST	<p>(The Center Square) – COVID-19 vaccine mandates have sparked nationwide controversy and led to firings and resignations around the country. Police officers have been hit hard by the requirements, and their exodus may leave many cities understaffed even on the heels of a spike in violent crime.</p> <p>In New York City, officers passed the mayor's deadline for vaccination Friday. The city announced that there are 26,000 unvaccinated municipal workers, including 17% of police officers. Those who refuse to comply will be placed on unpaid leave beginning Monday.</p> <p>But New York City is far from the only local government to take that route. Several municipalities have instituted vaccine mandates for police officers only to see a significant drop-off in staffing.</p>

Chicago, Minneapolis, Los Angeles and Seattle police departments have all grappled over this issue as well. In some areas, like Denver, data suggest that many officers who fought the mandate were in the end unwilling to resign over it. However, in other areas, police departments around the country have lost many officers due to the mandate.

Los Angeles County Sheriff Alex Villanueva grabbed headlines earlier this month after announcing he would not enforce the vaccine mandate on his staff, putting local leaders in a tough position. Last week, he called the mandate an “imminent threat to public safety.”

“The Board’s vaccination mandate is causing a mass exodus within the Department, which is an absolutely absurd result,” Villaneuva said. “I have repeatedly stated the dangers to public safety when 20%-30% of my workforce is no longer available to provide service, and those dangers are quickly becoming a reality. We are experiencing an increase in unscheduled retirements, worker compensation claims, employees quitting, and a reduction in qualified applicants. As a result, homicide rates will continue to rise, response times will increase, solve rates will diminish, arrests will decline, patrol services will significantly decline, and patrol stations will close.”

In Massachusetts, the The State Police Association of Massachusetts (SPAM) lost a legal battle in September challenging the state’s vaccine mandate, forcing many law enforcement officers out.

“The State Police are already critically short staffed and acknowledged this by the unprecedented moves which took troopers from specialty units that investigate homicides, terrorism, computer crimes, arsons, gangs, narcotics, and human trafficking, and returned them to uniformed patrol,” SPAM said in the statement.

The Seattle police department lost a few officers and has many more waiting to see if they can receive an exemption to the mandate.

"As of midnight, all but six Seattle Police Department employees have submitted their COVID-19 vaccination forms or are involved in an accommodation process, per city mandate," SPD said in mid-October. "For those six employees, the separation process has begun. Meanwhile, 103 sworn and civilian SPD employees submitted requests for either a medical or religious exemption. While away from work, those employees will be using their own accrued time balances. The decision on when and whether they will be allowed to return to work will be determined in the coming weeks."

Many of the officers leaving departments plan to head to more flexible employers.

“To date, dozens of troopers have already submitted their resignation paperwork, some of whom plan to return to other departments offering reasonable alternatives such as mask wearing and regular testing,” SPAM said.

Florida’s Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis has capitalized politically on the issue, publicly calling on ousted officers from around the nation to move to Florida.

"NYPD, Minneapolis, Seattle, if you're not being treated well, we'll treat you better here: you fill important needs for us, and we'll compensate you as a result," DeSantis told Fox News.

Mandates combined with growing friction between police and local governments over “defund the police” movements and other anti-police sentiments already had officers on edge. Now, many police groups have pushed back against the vaccine mandates, but have failed to sway several of the nation’s larger municipalities.

“The mandate-first, last, and only approach for law enforcement belies the public trust imbued on officers to make difficult, sometimes life and death decisions every day,” said Jason Johnson, president of the Law Enforcement Legal Defense Fund. “They are asked to quickly assess complex situations, apply their discretion, and act decisively and fairly – to uphold the law and protect the public. The men

and women who put their lives on the line for others and take on this immense responsibility are now being told their leaders' have no faith in their judgement."

Meanwhile, the nation saw a spike in violent crime last year, according to FBI data released in September.

Homicides rose nearly 30% in 2020 and aggravated assaults increased by more than 12%. That marked the first time in four years violent crime rose from the previous year.

There were roughly 21,500 reported murders in 2020, the highest figure in decades.

"In 2020, there were an estimated 1,277,696 violent crimes," the FBI said. "When compared with the estimates from 2019, the estimated number of robbery offenses fell 9.3 percent and the estimated volume of rape (revised definition) offenses decreased 12.0 percent. The estimated number of aggravated assault offenses rose 12.1 percent, and the volume of murder and nonnegligent manslaughter offenses increased 29.4 percent."

Last weekend, Chicago saw a 220% increase in downtown shootings, raising more concerns about the need for police.

"But don't worry, [Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot] thinks the best way to solve this serious problem of increased downtown shootings is by stripping and removing cops from the street," said Chicago's Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 7, a local police union chapter.

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HEADLINE	10/31 No active search for permanent UWPD chief
SOURCE	https://www.dailyuw.com/news/safety/article_b811e17a-3ac0-11ec-8082-f7a88c1517ab.html
GIST	<p>UWPD has remained without a permanent police chief since the resignation of John Vinson in May 2019. Two and a half years later, a search to fill the position is not currently underway, according to university spokesperson Victor Balta.</p> <p>Vinson stepped down after an independent review of UWPD operations revealed a culture of mistrust and poor communication. Vice president of student life Denzel Suite authorized the review after the Board of Regents received a letter from UWPD employees alleging Vinson's use of intimidation tactics.</p> <p>According to Balta, a plan for the search has not been established, nor does the university have an expected timeline for filling the position. When a search is launched, the process will be organized by UW administrators.</p> <p>"Typically, there is a search committee made up of university stakeholders that make recommendations to University Leadership for a final decision," Balta said in an email. "In this case, university leadership responsible for the decision is the VP of Student Life and the President."</p> <p>The process also typically includes listening sessions held by the search committee, providing a platform for student organizations and UW community members to provide input.</p> <p>The most recent search process took place in January 2019, narrowing down the candidates to two finalists: Eric Sano, captain of the Seattle Police Department's North Precinct, and Terence Calloway, Florida A&M University (FAMU) Police Department chief.</p> <p>Calloway dropped out of the running near the end of January after The Daily reported the FAMU police department faced multiple lawsuits "alleging age, disability, and racial discrimination" under Calloway's leadership. A lawsuit claiming discrimination by Calloway awarded one FAMU officer more than \$400,000.</p>

	<p>Sano was not hired, concluding the search unsuccessfully.</p> <p>“None of the candidates emerged from the process with strong enough support from the committee to justify moving them forward,” Balta said.</p> <p>With the position vacant, interim chief Randall West continues to run the department.</p> <p>West, who served as the department’s deputy chief from 2010 to 2015 was asked by Suite to return to UWPD as interim chief in May 2019 following Vinson’s resignation. West initially anticipated staying in the position for less than a year while they searched to fill the permanent position, but several obstacles have led to him remaining in the position longer than expected.</p> <p>“There was a process for chief and they were unsuccessful in finding the right person for the job, and then COVID hit ... so I’ve been here two and a half years,” West said.</p> <p>West also noted widespread protests following the murder of George Floyd made it difficult to fill the position of permanent police chief.</p> <p>West emphasized his tenure at UWPD depends on the vacancy of the permanent chief position. “I plan to be here only as long as it takes to find the next chief,” West said.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/01 Election workers face threats, harassment
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/nov/01/us-election-workers-threats-violence
GIST	<p>Before he leaves his house to walk his dog these days, Rick Barron’s 12-year-old-daughter reminds him that he needs to keep an eye out because she worries her dad could be the target of an attack.</p> <p>Barron, 55, is the director of voting and elections in Fulton county, which includes Atlanta and is the most populous county in Georgia. For the last year, he’s been subject to a barrage of voicemails and emails with threats, including some threatening violence and death, as Donald Trump and his allies have falsely claimed the election was stolen.</p> <p>“You will be served lead,” someone said on a voicemail left for Barron in recent months.</p> <p>It’s an experience being shared by state and local officials across the United States. For decades, those officials have largely been invisible, working out of the public spotlight to ensure the machinery of elections runs smoothly. But as Trump and allies target that machinery as part of an effort to insist something was amiss in 2020, those officials have been thrust into the national spotlight and subject to vicious harassment. Nearly one in three election officials feel unsafe in their job, according to an April survey commissioned by the Brennan Center for Justice.</p> <p>“It’s been a barrage every day,” Katie Hobbs, Arizona’s secretary of state, told the Guardian. She said the threats have bombarded virtually every part of her office, including services that have nothing to do with elections.</p> <p>Hobbs, a Democrat who is running for governor, testified last week at a Senate hearing on the threats, telling lawmakers her family had also been threatened, with calls coming in to her husband’s employer to fire him. Al Schmidt, a Republican election official in Philadelphia, told senators the threats were “domestic terrorism” as he read messages calling for the murder of him and his family.</p> <p>Barron has overseen elections in Fulton county since 2013 and has been working on elections for more than two decades. He said he’s never experienced the kinds of attacks that he’s seen over the past year.</p>

“I’ve done election observations overseas and you see how in those emerging democracies, former Soviet countries, how people are afraid to vote certain ways and so they all vote for the person. You can see now that possibility on the horizon at some point,” he said.

Barron and other election officials said that partisan websites as well as elected officials who continue to spread misleading and false information were facilitating the harassment. Barron described a spike in threats against him between Christmas and New Year’s last year after Trump played a video of Barron to supporters [at a Georgia rally](#).

They also said they’re deeply concerned that so many election officials are [choosing to leave](#) the [profession](#), creating openings for people with little experience or nefarious motives to get into positions where they could exercise enormous power over how elections are run.

“There are a lot of people leaving the profession. So I think you’re gonna end up with more inexperienced people running these offices. You’re going to see people in these types of jobs for a shorter period of time because the stress, after a while, it’s hard to ignore it all the time,” Barron said.

“I think part of the purpose of these threats and this ongoing lie is to get people to quit their jobs,” said Claire Woodall-Vogg, the executive director of the Milwaukee election commission, who has also received a wave of threats since the election. “So that then you have either elections that aren’t as well run and you get people in who you can control.”

In Milwaukee, another place where Trump has falsely claimed fraud, Woodall-Vogg linked threats she has received to misleading stories published in the Gateway Pundit, a far-right news site that frequently published false information about elections.

Last year, she began getting some angry calls after the site ran a story [inaccurately saying](#) she “lost” a USB drive on election night. She started receiving [death threats](#) this summer after the site published an email from election night in which [she jokingly responded](#) to an elections consultant about the timing of when Milwaukee released its election results. “I should have not responded,” she said.

Threats began pouring in over email, saying things like Woodall-Vogg deserved to go before a firing squad and calling her “treasonous”. She received a letter at home and threats to her personal Gmail account.

Woodall-Vogg wasn’t persuaded the callers would actually act on the threat, but went out of state for 10 days last summer as a precaution. She also got an alarm system and a Ring doorbell for extra security at home. At work, the office layout is being reconfigured to adjust the point at which someone coming in first interacts with a staff member. Workers are also installing security glass that is harder to break, Woodall-Vogg said.

“I always liked that my job was non-partisan. I really don’t like politics,” said Woodall-Vogg. “I feel like in the past year, the threats are a direct result of the same political rhetoric that’s made my job as partisan and as contentious as it is. It’s all resulting from this facade of election fraud, that the election was rigged.”

As election officials face threats across the country, Republican lawmakers have inserted provisions into several new laws that impose steep penalties for officials who run afoul of election rules. In Iowa, a new Republican-backed law authorizes a fine of up to [\\$10,000](#) on officials who commit “technical infraction”. A new Texas law similarly authorizes criminal punishment and [\\$1,000 fines](#) on election officials who fail to follow rules.

Law enforcement across the country has struggled to respond to the threats against election officials, a [Reuters investigation](#) from September found. The investigation identified 102 threats of violence or death against election officials in key battleground states, but could only document four instances in which someone had been charged, though it’s possible there may have been more arrests.

	<p>The justice department launched a taskforce to address threats against election workers in July. In August, the official in charge of the taskforce told secretaries of state that “the response has been inadequate,” according to Reuters. Federal officials lacked the infrastructure to constantly monitor threats against election officials nationwide and relied on those who were aware of them to report them.</p> <p>“A lot of these law enforcement agencies are relying on us to report. And it’s hard for us to know what we should be reporting, because we’re not trained in threat assessment and it’s hard for us to know and to have the time to sort through,” Hobbs said. “There’s always the possibility that we’re missing something.”</p>
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HEADLINE	10/31 Australia fully vaccinated reopens: 583 days
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/nov/01/hugs-and-tears-as-families-reunite-at-sydney-airport-after-australias-international-border-reopens
GIST	<p>Sydney airport has become the scene of tearful family reunions, with fully vaccinated Australians able to fly home and walk straight out of the airport for the first time in 583 days.</p> <p>Many of the passengers who were onboard the first flights from Singapore and Los Angeles walked into the arrivals terminal shortly after 6am on Monday morning to be greeted by emotional family members and loved ones.</p> <p>NSW has revealed the next two stages of reopening. New freedoms will be extended to the vaccinated when the state reaches 80% double-dose Covid vaccination, with wider lockdown restrictions lifting for all residents on 1 December. Check our guide to coronavirus rules and restrictions for vaccinated and unvaccinated people in Sydney and regional New South Wales.</p> <p>Returning Australians were handed Tim Tams and hakea pincushion flowers as they made their way through a crowd of reporters.</p> <p>“I’ve got to get to my daughter, I’ve got to hold her,” one woman said as she pushed through the throng to embrace her daughter.</p> <p>Carlie Boyd was one of the first Australians to push a trolley of suitcases into the arrivals hall – clearing the heavily sterilised customs area at 6.28am and breathing in the crisp Sydney morning air for the first time in more than three years.</p> <p>Boyd’s brother Ryan Boyd and sister Clare Lyons had arrived at the airport before 6am with a balloon and sign to welcome her, and raced to hug her.</p> <p>“It’s been pretty stressful, so just to be able to come home without having to go quarantine is huge,” Boyd said.</p> <p>She had been living in New York, and after being unable to secure a flight home during the months of quarantine arrival caps, bought her Qantas ticket to Sydney three days ago.</p> <p>She and her siblings planned to surprise their parents at their Blue Mountains family home.</p> <p>“There were a lot of people on that flight who have loved ones who are about to die or had people who died this week, so for them to be able to get off the plane and go and see them straight away is pretty amazing,” Boyd said.</p> <p>Other passengers Guardian Australia spoke to said there were only about 70 people on the first Qantas flight, and that many were visiting dying loved ones.</p> <p>When Ethan Carter walked into the arrivals hall and on to Australian soil for the first time in two years, he had only one thing on his mind. His mother, Joy.</p>

“I’m anxious and excited and can’t wait to see her.”

Carter, who lives in Chicago, said he was desperate to see his mother, who has fallen ill and been moved into permanent care.

“She’s in WA, so I don’t want to talk about their laws ... I might not ever be let in,” he said. “I’m really scared and emotional because I really want to see my mum.” He choked up as he added: “The doctor said that she hasn’t got long.”

He then approached border officials to discuss how he could fly to Perth to quarantine before visiting his mother.

He also issued a plea to the Western Australian premier, Mark McGowan: “Mark, think of the people that are suffering mentally to see their family, that’s also a health issue ... You’ve got to bring families together again, you have to – everybody needs to be together, it’s so important.

“We respect that you’re trying to be safe, but everyone needs to be together, please.”

Elsewhere in the arrivals halls, some were meeting new family members for the first time.

Moments after her son Robert walked out of the customs hall with his partner, Ivan, and daughter, Pia, Deb d’Apice picked up her two-year-old granddaughter, held her up to her face, and stared into her eyes.

“It’s fabulous, I just feel fabulous,” she said.

Upstairs at the departure gates, travel-hungry Australians were gathering to make the most of the international travel freedoms that also came into effect on Monday.

After hearing that international trips would be allowed without an exemption – and knowing tht she would not have to quarantine on her return – Nicole Forrest booked tickets with United Airlines to travel to Mexico with her daughter, 12-year-old Olive.

They will fly through Los Angeles before travelling to Tulum, where the pair from Cronulla are planning to enjoy beaches and visit local sites.

“It’s f**king exciting,” Forrest said. “It’s going to be a spiritual experience.”

Olive said she was most excited to sample the food in Mexico.

Miad and Zahra Zandabi were flying to Boston, where they are moving to for a job that Miad organised more than a year ago but for which they had been unable to secure exit approvals.

“To be honest, we’re sad to be leaving Australia, but after the lockdown it’s very exciting to start anew,” Miad said. The Pagewood couple have family overseas, and hope to be able to visit them more easily.

Melanie Carrier posed for a photo at the Sydney departures sign before farewelling her partner, Richard Peake, and walking to her flight’s departure gate. She is travelling to visit family in Montreal who she hasn’t seen for more than two years.

“I just want to be able to go home,” she said. “We’ve missed weddings and birthdays, and I want to hug my parents again.”

The experience of dropping someone off at departures felt strange to Peake, who noted that there was none of the typical congestion and parking shortages of pre-pandemic days.

	<p>While airline officials reported queues in the international terminal being the longest they'd been all year, the airport is far from its full capacity. On Monday there will be 16 international flight arrivals and 14 departures, up from the average of 10 arrivals and departures each day since July last year. But while most arriving flights have been limited to 10 passengers, flights on Monday had no limits on how many vaccinated passengers they could carry.</p> <p>As Australians walked into the arrivals area and into the arms of their loved ones, airline executives and politicians held press conferences. Most struggled to hold the attention of media, who were instead focused on speaking to travellers.</p> <p>"Today Sydney has reopened Australia to the world," said the New South Wales tourism minister, Stuart Ayres.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/31 Unexpected: Covid pushed many to retire
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-19-pushed-many-americans-to-retire-the-economy-needs-them-back-11635691340?mod=hp_lead_pos7
GIST	<p>The Covid-19 pandemic has boosted retirements among baby boomers, further straining the tight labor supply and leaving a hole for employers to fill.</p> <p>Older workers who could least afford to retire early—those with lower incomes and less education—have been more likely to leave the workforce during the pandemic, researchers have found. The question is whether their retreat is temporary or permanent. Some retired because of Covid-19 fears, and others after failing to find suitable work.</p> <p>The rising value of stocks, homes and other assets also has prompted a group of more affluent boomers to also retire earlier than expected, economists said. Other researchers believe the rise in the number of retirees is because fewer of them are re-entering the workforce.</p> <p>The shifting labor force is complicating the work of economic policy makers trying to determine which jobs lost in the pandemic will return and how many American workers will be available to fill them. So far, it isn't clear if recent retirees will be lured back to work by better jobs and pay—or because they miss their working lives—and how many are gone for good.</p> <p>In September, the U.S. had 5 million fewer jobs than it had before the pandemic, Labor Department data show. Yet employers have reported high rates of unfilled openings in such industries as leisure and hospitality, manufacturing and transportation, contributing to slowdowns in production and the delivery of services.</p> <p>Hiring difficulties have also increased competition for workers and put upward pressure on wages. Across the economy, there were 10.4 million unfilled jobs at the end of August, according to the Labor Department, exceeding the roughly 8.4 million unemployed Americans looking for work.</p> <p>Fed governor Randal Quarles said he didn't expect workforce participation rates to return to pre-pandemic levels. "One reason is that a disproportionate number of older workers responded to the initial shock of the Covid event by retiring," he said. A slower rebound in workforce participation could keep pressure on wages, potentially leading Fed officials to raise interest rates sooner than they had anticipated.</p> <p>The Federal Reserve Banks of Kansas City and Dallas are among the groups tracking the growth in retirees. The share of the population in retirement from February 2020 to April this year was higher by 1.5 million people than it would have been if the 2019 retirement trend had continued, according to the Dallas Fed.</p>

The proportion of Americans 16 and older who weren't in the workforce because of retirement reached a seasonally adjusted 19.6% in the third quarter this year compared with 18.5% in the pre-pandemic fourth quarter of 2019, according to data from the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia.

With the baby boomer generation reaching old age, economists acknowledge that some who retired in the pandemic would have likely done so over the next few years anyway. Many employers wish they had waited.

Veronica Primus, 69 years old, retired in June from her job as a literacy coach with the Richland School District in Columbia, S.C. "My principal said, 'You can't stay another year?,' " recalled Ms. Primus, who before the pandemic had planned to work two more years. "And I said, 'No, I'm tired.' "

Ms. Primus said one reason she retired was that she believed educators would be under pressure to close student achievement gaps caused by the pandemic, and she didn't want the stress.

She plans to expand her education consulting business to stay busy and supplement her retirement savings and Social Security benefits. After five decades working in education, she said she would first take a few months to "take a pause, take a breath."

Help wanted

While many younger workers who left the labor force early in the pandemic have since rejoined, older workers haven't returned in the same numbers, according to Labor Department data. Among Americans in the prime working ages of 25 to 54, the labor-force participation rate—the proportion of those working or seeking work—rebounded to a seasonally adjusted 81.6% in September from 79.8% in April 2020, at the start of the pandemic.

For Americans 55 and older, the rate was 38.6% in September, virtually unchanged from April a year ago, the data show.

Even before the pandemic, overall labor-force participation in the U.S. was falling as the nation's population aged. The rate hovered at about 63% before the pandemic, down from its peak of roughly 67% in the 2000s.

The pickup in retirements during the pandemic highlighted the phenomenon, said Jed Kolko, chief economist at Indeed, a jobs website. "The size of the working-age population is growing more slowly than it used to," he said.

Kevin O'Connor, 58, said working from home in the pandemic helped him realize that he didn't want to go back to the frequent travel schedule normally required for his job at LogicMark, a medical-systems manufacturer. He retired in June, a couple of years before he had planned.

Mr. O'Connor, who lives in the Minneapolis metropolitan area, said he looked forward to seeing his grandchildren more often and maybe spending winters in a warmer city. He credited the performance of his savings portfolio with helping solidify his decision to retire early. For him, he said, "the economy didn't come to a screeching halt."

Stephanie Aaronson, director of the economic studies program at the Brookings Institution, said while retirement decisions typically stick, some seniors could return to work if they see improved working conditions. She cited the rise in labor-participation rates among older Americans late in the last economic expansion, when a tight labor market coaxed some back to work.

Bruce White, 63, was among those who wanted to keep working during the pandemic but couldn't get hired. He said he submitted more than 100 applications after losing his job managing records at a hospitality company in Orlando, Fla., the result of the company's pandemic cost-cutting.

“I was going to work until I was 66 or 67 or as long as I could work,” said Mr. White, of Stuart, Fla. “I wasn’t ready to start collecting Social Security.”

Mr. White, supported by retirement savings and Social Security, said money hasn’t been his main concern. Not working is what has taken a toll. Some days, he said, “I was in a funk, didn’t want to get up, didn’t want to do anything.” He believes his age makes him unattractive to employers.

Siavash Radpour, associate research director at the Retirement Equity Lab at The New School, a private university in New York, said some older workers face discrimination in hiring. They may be passed over even in industries with plenty of openings, such as food services, because employers consider the jobs physically demanding, he said. That means some older workers “don’t really have the option to come back to the labor force,” he said.

‘Further behind’

Research suggests that some early exits from the workforce in the pandemic were more pronounced among seniors with less education and lower incomes.

A higher share of workers without a college degree retired before the traditional retirement age of 65 compared with those who had a college education, according to the Retirement Equity Lab. The lab’s analysis of census data found that retirement rates for those ages 55 to 64 without a college degree rose by 0.8 percentage point from 2019 to 2021, compared with a decline of 0.6 percentage point for similarly aged workers with a degree.

Boston College’s Center for Retirement Research used census data to determine that job losses earlier in the pandemic were steeper among lower-income older workers compared with higher-earning ones.

About 38% of workers aged 62 and older and in the lowest third of weekly earnings no longer held jobs in the fourth quarter of 2020, up from 28% in the second quarter of 2019, according to the analysis from Geoffrey Sanzenbacher, a research fellow at the center.

Among similarly aged workers in the highest third of weekly earnings, 22% weren’t working during the fourth quarter of 2020 compared with 18% in the second quarter of 2019.

Workers with less education and lower incomes are less likely to have robust retirement savings and are at higher risk of financial troubles from unplanned retirement, said Mr. Radpour of The New School.

Walter Minard hadn’t planned to retire until the pandemic hit. He was going to work at least three more years, he said. But Covid-19 made his job inside a Pella, Iowa, equipment manufacturing plant feel too risky. Mr. Minard, 65, was an inventory coordinator at Vermeer Corp. He took stock of deliveries from truck drivers and couriers, he said, and his desk was in the middle of the plant floor.

Mr. Minard has diabetes, high blood pressure and other health conditions that put him at greater risk for serious illness from the coronavirus. “I felt like if I caught anything or whatever, it would probably kill me,” he said. He left his job in April 2020.

He is vaccinated but fears returning to the workplace. His health has worsened since retiring, he said, and he now requires kidney dialysis.

Mr. Minard considers himself retired but burdened with worry. Leaving his roughly \$45,000 a year job—and its company-sponsored health insurance—yielded a financial crisis for his family, he said. Mr. Minard’s wife, who worked at a fast-food restaurant, also quit her job at the start of the pandemic over the fear of passing Covid-19 to her husband.

The family fell behind on mortgage payments by about \$16,000, he said. Mr. Minard started collecting Social Security payments, but he said it hasn’t been enough to cover daily expenses, the house payment and medical costs.

	<p>Like many Americans, Mr. Minard had little in retirement savings. A survey from the Fed found that about half of U.S. households in 2019 didn't have retirement accounts.</p> <p>Mr. Minard gave up his house, he said, because he knew he couldn't afford to keep it. He and his wife moved to a camper trailer, he said, and have begun the process of filing for bankruptcy. "We just kept getting further and further behind," he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/31 Michigan suffers from another water crisis
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/michigan-is-suffering-from-another-water-crisis-this-time-in-benton-harbor-11635686526?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1
GIST	<p>For years, the amount of lead in Benton Harbor's water has been over the federal standard. Michigan state officials have instructed residents since 2018 to flush their water for five minutes daily to help reduce potential toxins that had been stagnant in lead pipes for extended periods.</p> <p>So when the state recommended avoiding tap water and the city declared a state of emergency in October, many residents and officials questioned why these actions came when they did.</p> <p>The situation is reminding local residents of what happened in Flint, Mich., which suffered a drinking water emergency several years ago. In Flint's case, the city changed its water source to cut costs in 2014. Officials failed to implement corrosion-control measures, setting in motion a chain of chemical reactions in miles of old pipes, exposing thousands to lead and bacteria and killing 12 people.</p> <p>More than a dozen officials were charged in connection with the crisis, including former Gov. Rick Snyder, whose lawyers have called the charges unfounded. A former state health department official was convicted on a willful neglect charge.</p> <p>In Benton Harbor, a city of 9,000 about 200 miles west of Flint, old pipes are the problem. Water running through corroding pipes picks up lead and other contaminants. Some residents stopped drinking the water years ago; some say they are angered by what they describe as a lackluster response from city and state officials.</p> <p>"It makes me feel like we're third-class citizens—that we're unworthy of [a] good, quality life," said Michael Hoyh, caretaker of the historic First Congregational Church building in Benton Harbor, which serves as a community center.</p> <p>Mr. Hoyh, who also lives in the building, said he felt the city's water was unsafe when lead was first detected in 2018 during routine testing. He began mostly drinking bottled water in 2020, but still used an on-the-faucet filter to brush his teeth and cook. Now, he uses bottled water for that, too.</p> <p>Lead levels in Benton Harbor have actually decreased in recent years, according to a report from the state environmental department. The percentage of sample sites with water above the federal lead level standard fell to 14% this year, from 27% in 2018. The percentage of samples with zero lead detected has increased to 33% from 17% during that period, according to the report.</p> <p>There have been attempts to treat the water chemically, but those efforts didn't reduce the lead levels to below federal standards, according to the most recent test results.</p> <p>Community residents and lawmakers are asking why the recommendation to stop drinking tap water came when it did instead of when high lead levels were first detected.</p> <p>"We still do not have a good answer as to why residents were told in October of 2021 to stop drinking the water," State Rep. Steven Johnson, a Republican, said in an email. "From what we can see now, nothing has really changed in the past three years."</p>

He said that the timing of more urgent messaging from state and local officials comes amid a petition filed in September by about 20 organizations urging the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to provide the city with clean water. The petition asserts that local and state officials haven't adequately responded to the emergency. The EPA has said that it is working with the state to ensure residents have access to bottled water or reliable filters.

In response to a question about its recommendation that residents drink bottled water, Michigan's health department said that questions had been raised about the effectiveness of water filters during chemical treatment and that it was conducting a study to ensure they worked.

Benton Harbor Mayor Marcus Muhammad didn't respond to requests for comment on the timing of the state of emergency declaration and recommendation for residents to avoid drinking the city's tap water. The state of emergency allows city government to expedite its response to the water crisis and raises attention to the issue, Mr. Muhammad has said.

The Great Lakes Environmental Law Center, a nonprofit, signed the petition because the severity of the situation hasn't been effectively communicated, said executive director Nick Leonard.

"If you don't make clear what the levels of risk are, residents may not heed or fully understand the warning," he said. "And that can have very serious consequences."

Lead, even at low levels, is harmful to humans. The EPA says lead exposure has been linked to nervous-system damage, learning disabilities and slowed growth in children, as well as complications for pregnant women.

Under Michigan's Lead and Copper Rule, municipalities are required to replace 5% of their lead service lines every year. Any community experiencing lead levels over the federal standard is required to replace 7% of their lead service lines annually.

Replacing the lead pipes in Benton Harbor will cost about \$30 million, according to figures from Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's office. Of that, \$18.6 million has already been allocated to the city through state funds and a federal grant.

Ms. Whitmer said the state would take an "all-hands-on-deck" approach to address the issue during a visit to Benton Harbor, which sits on Lake Michigan, earlier this month. Ms. Whitmer, a Democrat, said her administration's goal is to replace all of the city's lead pipes within 18 months. She called on Michigan's Republican-controlled legislature to allocate \$11.4 million—using money provided to Michigan under the American Rescue Plan—to fund the investment.

Before receiving the \$18.6 million allocated by the state, the city had used funds from a \$284,000 state grant it received in 2018 to replace lead service lines, according to Mr. Muhammad.

Mr. Muhammad called for more funding during an Oct. 21 legislative hearing probing the crisis at the capitol in Lansing. He said in an email that he is focused on working with city, county and state officials to remedy the water problem within the governor's proposed time frame.

Edward Pinkney—president of Benton Harbor Community Council, and pastor of a local church—said he began telling residents not to drink tap water in 2018. His church, God's Household of Faith, has been supplying bottled water to the community since 2019.

"While government didn't take it seriously, we did," he said. "They failed this community."

The state legislature launched an investigation earlier this month, requesting a trove of documents from Michigan's environmental department following a Detroit News report detailing failing corrosion-control measures and poor communication with the public.

“We need to react right away to find out whether there was some sort of malfeasance or dereliction of duty going on,” said Sen. Ed McBroom, chair of the oversight committee. The Republican legislator was vice chair on a congressional committee investigating the Flint water crisis when he was a state representative in 2016.

Mr. Hoyh said the county has provided the four-story, 155-year-old community center building only one filter despite it having more than 12 faucets and that his requests for additional free filters were denied.

A spokeswoman for Berrien County, which includes Benton Harbor and is responsible for distributing the filters, said that although bottled water is being recommended, it is still providing free filters and replacement cartridges. Households are given at least one filter and the county replaces cartridges as needed. Roughly 2,700 filters were distributed to Benton Harbor’s 3,000 water customers starting in 2019, she said.

As of Oct. 20, more than 71,000 cases of bottled water had been distributed to Benton Harbor residents without charge since Sept. 30, according to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

Nearly half of Benton Harbor residents live in poverty. Black people make up 85% of the total population, according to 2019 U.S. census estimates. In Flint, by comparison, 54% of the city is Black and 39% of residents live in poverty.

Mr. Hoyh said that government agencies haven’t tested the community center’s water and questioned whether the situation would be the same if the city’s demographics were different. The state of Michigan says nongovernment organizations are working with the state to test more homes.

“Nobody has come knocking at my door,” Mr. Hoyh said. “We’ve been forgotten. We’re a Black community, and who cares about a Black community, right?”

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HEADLINE	10/31 When does the pandemic end?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2021/10/31/when-does-the-pandemic-end/
GIST	<p>The pandemic isn’t over. But new cases nationally have dropped below 75,000 a day, less than half the number in August. The United States will soon reopen land borders to vaccinated visitors and lift several international travel restrictions. More than 2 million people boarded flights last Sunday, not too far from pre-pandemic travel levels.</p> <p>Kids, many of them newly vaccine-eligible, are back in school, with no massive surge of new coronavirus infections. Some older students, forced to mask, wear their face coverings as if they were chin guards.</p> <p>The holidays are coming, and it won’t be like 2020 this time. It’s already obvious in the Halloween decorations, so over-the-top it looks like people are overcompensating for last year’s depressed trick-or-treating.</p> <p>The pandemic appears to be winding down in the United States in a thousand subtle ways, but without any singular milestone, or a cymbal-crashing announcement of freedom from the virus.</p> <p>“It doesn’t end. We just stop caring. Or we care a lot less,” Jennifer Nuzzo, an epidemiologist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, said when asked when the pandemic would be over. “I think for most people, it just fades into the background of their lives.”</p> <p>There could still be a winter surge since respiratory viruses thrive when people huddle in heated rooms. Some experts said they expect at least a modest uptick in infections over the next few weeks. Last year’s brutal winter wave of infections, which peaked in January, was just getting rolling at this point on the calendar.</p>

And although aggregate national numbers are lower, many cold-weather states, particularly in the Mountain West, have recently seen a rise in cases and hospitalizations. Alaska, slipping into its dark winter, has the highest infection rate in the nation.

Infectious-disease experts and Biden administration officials are not about to make any definitive predictions about when the pandemic might end. The virus, SARS-CoV-2, is slippery and opportunistic. It is still mutating. It has appeared to lose traction several times over the past year and a half, only to surge anew as it took advantage of more lax behavior and the contagiousness of mutated variants.

Even so, the trends are favorable. With most people vaccinated and infection rates dropping, the United States has entered a new phase of the pandemic in which people are adapting to the persistent presence of an endemic but usually nonlethal pathogen. They really have no choice. The virus isn't going away.

"I think it's becoming slowly part of the furniture," said Andrew Noymer, an epidemiologist at the University of California at Irvine. He is still wearing masks in grocery stores, but no longer does he always don one of the highly protective N95 masks. "I don't want to wear scuba gear everywhere I go. This is just part of the human environment now."

That's also the view of Robert M. Wachter, chair of the Department of Medicine at the University of California at San Francisco. Wachter is hardly complacent about the virus. This summer, he took to social media to warn people they needed to renew their vigilance as the delta variant took hold and breakthrough infections became more common.

But he's vaccinated and boosted now, and making his risk calculations under the assumption that our current environment is roughly as good as it's going to get. And he doesn't want to forgo travel and indoor dining the rest of his life.

"My feeling now is that we're nearing a steady state where things might get a little better or worse, for the next few years. It's not great, but it is what it is," Wachter said in an email.

"There's no cavalry coming, so decisions now should be predicated on this being something near steady state. To me, particularly once I got my booster, it prompts me to accept a bit more risk, mainly because if I'm not comfortable doing it now, I'm basically saying that I won't do it for several years, and maybe forever."

'We don't want the virus to win'

The uncertainties over what the virus will do in coming months present a messaging challenge for the Biden administration. The White House needs people to see the pandemic as a real and present threat to public health, one that requires continued precautions and universal vaccination. Officials simultaneously want to be perceived as being on top of the situation.

What they don't want to do is get caught prematurely celebrating the positive trends of recent weeks. That happened earlier this year, when vaccine uptake was going well, infection numbers were dropping, and the Biden administration felt confident enough to project the Fourth of July as the start of a summer largely free of the virus.

"Today, we're closer than ever to declaring our independence from a deadly virus," President Biden said in his July 4 remarks. "We've gained the upper hand against this virus. We can live our lives, our kids can go back to school, our economy is roaring back."

The delta variant, detected but underestimated, blew the "summer of freedom" to smithereens. A July 4 party on the South Lawn of the White House became Biden's "aircraft carrier moment," in the words of Noymer, the University of California at Irvine epidemiologist. Noymer was invoking the episode during the Iraq War when President George W. Bush flew to a Navy ship and spoke under a "Mission

Accomplished” banner even though the war was, as it turned out, years and many thousands of casualties from being over.

A July 4 weekend outbreak among mostly vaccinated partygoers in Provincetown, Mass., rattled the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. By the end of the month, it had reimposed indoor mask guidance for the inoculated.

Officials are cautiously optimistic that the recent decline in cases and deaths could continue into the winter. But they also want the public to stay on task and take precautions to limit viral spread. The vast majority of U.S. counties still have what the CDC classifies as high transmission.

More than 1,000 people on average are still dying of covid-19 every day in the United States. Someday, the coronavirus may be viewed more like influenza, but experts say we’re not there yet.

“Don’t you think people in 1943 were tired of World War II?” said Francis S. Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health.

For the record, that war lasted until the late summer of 1945.

“Somehow, we have to keep convincing people that this is not something being imposed upon them by the government. It’s being imposed on them by the virus. And we don’t want the virus to win,” Collins said.

Administration officials and many disease experts stress that the return to normalcy hinges on when and how many of the more than 60 million remaining eligible Americans get vaccinated.

“Delta may be our last major wave of infection as covid transitions to a more endemic virus,” said Scott Gottlieb, a former Food and Drug Administration commissioner and Pfizer board member. “It’ll continue to evolve, probably requiring occasional updates to our vaccines every year or two, and it’s going to become a part of our lives like a second circulating flu. But we have the tools, if we use them right, and we have enough immunity already in our population now, to substantially reduce the death and severe disease it causes.”

Other experts are less confident the pandemic will fade away.

“I’m incredibly doubtful this is our last surge, and I think some geographic areas are going to be hit again,” said Michael T. Osterholm, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota and a Biden transition pandemic adviser. “There’s this waning immunity issue. Is it or is it not occurring, and how much? Could we be back in the soup again when we’re in pretty darn good shape today? What will it be like in 12 months?”

Meanwhile, the American public, even while resuming many pre-pandemic activities, is keenly aware that normal life hasn’t returned. A recent Quinnipiac poll asked when things will be back to normal, and 81 percent of adults answered “about a year” or more, including 26 percent who answered “never.”

The Biden administration is well aware that the president’s approval ratings are in part tied to how Americans perceive his management of the pandemic. Biden’s approval ratings, according to Gallup, have fallen 14 percentage points since June, when delta hadn’t fully gained traction and the number of new daily cases was at a low point.

Biden’s health advisers have told him the most effective way to snuff out the pandemic is to continue to increase vaccinations. So the administration’s overriding focus during the next couple of months is to increase vaccinations, particularly through a rule Biden announced in September requiring businesses with more than 100 workers to mandate vaccinations among employees or have them face regular testing. That rule is expected to be finalized and implemented in coming weeks and affect about 100 million workers.

“We’re following the approach that has served us well from the beginning. Keeping our eye on the ball, getting more people vaccinated,” said Jeff Zients, the White House coronavirus response coordinator. “The virus has proven to be unpredictable, and we cannot and will not let up.”

The trajectory of the pandemic is an urgent matter for people making holiday-season plans. Last year, millions of families chose not to gather as they traditionally would have. This year, they have a green light, or maybe a flashing yellow.

“I think people should feel comfortable in celebrating the holidays in a reasonably normal way, be they trick-or-treating for Halloween, you can feel the same way about Thanksgiving, you can feel the same way about Christmas,” Anthony S. Fauci, Biden’s chief medical adviser for the pandemic, said.

“We are still in a pandemic phase,” he said, but added, “We are inching more and more toward normal.”

As long as people are coming into hospitals with severe cases of covid, the pandemic is all too real for front-line health-care workers. And it’s very real for the millions of parents with unvaccinated children, Nuzzo noted. Though that anxiety could ease, with Friday’s Food and Drug Administration announcement that the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine has been authorized for children 5 to 11 years old.

Economic disruptions have eased a bit, but there are huge supply-chain issues, jobs going unfilled, businesses barely staying afloat. Social and political divisions generated by the pandemic and the government response have calcified into anger, conspiracy theories and self-destructiveness.

Experts agree there is virtually no chance of eradicating the coronavirus. But the goal, Fauci said, is to get out of the “pandemic phase” and get to a “control phase.” That would probably mean fewer than 10,000 new cases daily, and that the vast majority of people do not face a significant risk from the virus even if they were to contract breakthrough infections.

Some models have predicted a steady decline in cases right through the winter, while others show a rise. The University of Washington’s Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation forecasts that infections will rise again in November and peak in midwinter, according to Ali Mokdad, an epidemiologist at the institute. Any hint that cases are rising should trigger a rapid response, Mokdad said.

The infection fatality rate of the virus is much lower than when it first hit. That’s in large part because of vaccines, and to some hard-to-calculate degree because so many people have gotten sick, recovered and are walking around with antibodies to the virus. New therapeutics and better clinical practices also improve the chances a severe infection won’t be fatal.

“There is an end to it,” Fauci said of the pandemic. “I don’t think we’re going to eradicate the virus. We’ve only eradicated one virus in all of history, and that’s smallpox. The good news is we’re going in the right direction in the deflection of the curve.”

Last year, influential public health experts such as Fauci urged people to avoid holiday travel and indoor gatherings. This year is different. Fauci, for his part, hopes at least one of his three daughters will be able to make it home for Thanksgiving.

By Christmas, he hopes the entire family will be together again. He plans to make timpano, a decadent Italian dish shaped like a drum and popularized by Stanley Tucci in the 1996 film “Big Night.” It’s a Fauci family tradition.

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HEADLINE	10/31 Health officials: victory against hepatitis A
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/homeless/public-health-officials-declare-victory-against-hepatitis-a-in-washington-after-successful-vaccine-push/

GIST	<p>While thousands of new daily COVID-19 cases are showing up in Washington state, health officials say that cases of hepatitis A, a less-publicized disease that threatened the state, have apparently been beaten back thanks to vaccination efforts.</p> <p>Reported cases of hepatitis A, a virus that sent 263 people to the hospital and killed nine in Washington since early 2019, have significantly declined, according to local and state public health officials, who last week declared victory in a two-and-a-half-year fight with hepatitis A in 21 Washington counties.</p> <p>From the beginning of 2019 through the end of this September, a total of 199 King County residents were reported to be infected with hepatitis A, of which 122 were hospitalized. For comparison, in the nine years previous there were just five to 16 yearly cases of hepatitis A reported in King County. The number of cases seems to have returned to that baseline, according to King County’s public health department.</p> <p>“This successful hepatitis A vaccination campaign is the result of years of thoughtful work among Public Health staff, partners and volunteers, who built relationships with people who are often hesitant to get vaccinated due to government and medical system disenfranchisement,” interim Director Dennis Worsham of Public Health – Seattle & King County said in a written release announcing the progress.</p> <p>The liver disease, which spreads through fecal matter, represented a particular risk to homeless campers, who live outside usually without access to toilets and hand-washing stations. If someone infected with hepatitis A doesn’t wash their hands well, especially after using the toilet, undetectable amounts of the virus can spread from the hands of that person to other objects, surfaces and foods, and easily infect others.</p> <p>Most reported cases in King County were among people who were homeless or who used drugs, particularly intravenous drugs. One notably large outbreak of more than a dozen cases was in a large encampment in Ballard Commons Park.</p> <p>After that outbreak last April, nonprofit leaders and homeless advocates asked the city to reopen bathrooms in libraries and public facilities that were newly closed because of COVID, even if the city had to staff them using the National Guard.</p> <p>Public Health – Seattle & King County launched an aggressive vaccination campaign in homeless camps, vaccinating more than 3,500 people at almost a thousand vaccination clinics at shelters, day centers and tiny house villages. Persuading a skeptical population that often has mixed histories with medical providers required building relationships and coming back again and again. The efforts pulled in everyone from shelter providers to hospitals, community clinics, drug treatment providers and religious groups.</p> <p>“The steep decrease in hepatitis A cases and prevention of a larger outbreak locally is an excellent example of what investment in public health can accomplish,” said Dr. Jeff Duchin, the department’s health officer, in a written statement. “The hepatitis A outbreak among people living homeless was complex and required multiple, sustained labor-intensive interventions and collaboration with community stakeholders and health care system partners. I’m proud of our staff, community partners, and government leaders, and grateful to people who stepped up to get vaccinated and take other action to prevent hepatitis A from spreading.”</p> <p>Experts at public health have said the effort prepared them for the COVID vaccination push, although that will take more sustained effort. As of August, the county had vaccinated almost 6,000 homeless people against COVID, but there were at last count nearly 12,000 homeless on a given night — and that count was before COVID hit.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/29 Intel agencies: virus origin murky
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/29/us/politics/coronavirus-origin-intelligence-report.html
GIST	WASHINGTON — American intelligence agencies are unlikely to be able to draw a firm conclusion about the origin of the novel coronavirus without more information from China on the earliest cases or

new scientific discoveries about the nature of the virus, said a newly declassified intelligence report released on Friday.

President Biden ordered the nation's intelligence agencies in May [to conduct a 90-day inquiry](#) into the origins of the pandemic. When the key findings of that review [were released in August](#), they failed to offer a single answer and instead reaffirmed the longstanding position of the agencies: The theory that the virus occurred naturally and the theory that it was accidentally created in a lab were both plausible.

But the report on Friday reiterated that the evidence to support either conclusion was thin, and that U.S. intelligence agencies know far too little about the origin of the virus. The intelligence community has concluded that the virus was not developed as a biological weapon.

Analysts "assess that a natural origin and a laboratory associated incident are both plausible hypotheses for how SARS-CoV-2 first infected humans," the report said. "Analysts, however, disagree on which is more likely, or whether an assessment can be made at all."

Four intelligence agencies, and the National Intelligence Council, consider the natural causes theory more plausible. One agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, backs the lab leak theory. But none of those agencies have delivered to the director of national intelligence or the White House a high-confidence assessment, which shows the doubt that continues to swirl around the question.

The intelligence community has broadly concluded that the virus causing Covid-19 was not deliberately engineered in a lab. But even that conclusion is made only with low confidence. Some genetic engineering techniques make modifications difficult to identify, particularly given existing gaps in knowledge about the diversity of naturally occurring coronaviruses.

"Some genetic engineering techniques may make genetically modified viruses indistinguishable from natural viruses, according to academic journal articles," the report said.

The intelligence report said the Wuhan Institute of Virology had previously made chimeras, or combinations of coronavirus that did not occur in nature. But that record provides little insight on whether the virus that causes Covid was genetically engineered, the report said.

Some Republican lawmakers have seized on that so-called gain-of-function work at the institute, arguing it buttresses the lab leak theory. At a House Intelligence Committee hearing this week, Representative Brad Wenstrup, Republican of Ohio and a medical doctor, called for more examination of the institute's work on creating chimeras.

"In this case, that means experimentally combining components from two viruses into one for the sake of making it more infectious to the general public," said Mr. Wenstrup, who has called for more hearings on the origin of the pandemic. "I can't be sure that Covid-19 originated from a research-related accident or infection from a sampling trip, but I'm 100 percent sure there was a massive cover-up."

The National Institutes of Health [has said the chimera experiments in Wuhan](#) were based on coronaviruses that were not the progenitors of the virus that causes Covid.

There is broad agreement in the Biden administration that China has not shared all it can about the origins of the outbreak. The intelligence report released on Friday called for more transparency by China, and said Beijing needed to release information about possible intermediate species that the virus could have infected before leaping to humans, what it knows about the nature of the first human infections and more data about the Wuhan Institute of Virology's research work.

But the report also made clear that on some matters Chinese officials were initially caught off guard. Critically, American intelligence analysts have assessed that Chinese officials did not know about the existence of the novel coronavirus until after Covid was detected in the population and it was isolated by the Wuhan institute.

“Accordingly, if the pandemic originated from a laboratory-associated incident, they probably were unaware in the initial months that such an incident had occurred,” the report said.

The report also suggested that the Wuhan institute researchers were not aware of the virus until the outbreak was underway, since they quickly pivoted to working on Covid as the outbreak grew worse. The new report relied heavily on the apparent surprise of Chinese officials and the Wuhan institute’s researchers as the pandemic grew worse to buttress the natural causes theory.

The wide array of animals susceptible to the virus causing Covid, and the various ways humans in China come in contact with those animals — including trafficking, farming, sale and rescue — make natural transmission possible.

While no animal source has been found, “analysts that assess the pandemic was due to natural causes note that in many previous zoonotic outbreaks, the identification of animal sources has taken years, and in some cases, animal sources have not been identified,” the report said.

On the flip side, analysts who supported the lab leak theory have also not found a smoking gun. Instead, they have highlighted that previous coronavirus work at the Wuhan institute was conducted under “inadequate biosafety conditions that could have led to opportunities for a laboratory-associated incident.”

The report said that some of the closest known relatives to the virus that causes Covid were found in bats from Yunnan Province. Researchers bringing samples to Wuhan could “provide a plausible link between these habitats and the city.”

“These analysts note that it is plausible that researchers may have unwittingly exposed themselves to the virus without sequencing it during experiments or sampling activities, possibly resulting in asymptomatic or mild infection,” the report said.

However, scientists have estimated that viruses identified in Yunnan diverged 40 years ago from the ancestors of SARS-CoV-2. [Other viruses found in Laos](#) bear a much closer similarity in some of their genes, and scientists expect that further investigation will uncover even more closely related coronaviruses in bats.

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HEADLINE	10/31 Iran nuke program ‘starting to be a problem’
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/oct/31/starting-be-problem-biden-scrambles-stop-irans-inc/
GIST	<p>Top Biden administration officials warned Sunday that Iran’s nuclear program is “starting to be a problem” and that the U.S. and its allies have limited time to strike a deal with Tehran before it stockpiles enough material for a nuclear bomb.</p> <p>Speaking Sunday on CBS’s “Face the Nation,” Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the administration is hopeful that all sides can come back into compliance with the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), a pact that limited Iran’s nuclear weapons program in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions. President Biden confirmed Saturday that talks with Iran, which have been on hold since Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi came to power in June, will soon resume.</p> <p>Officials acknowledge they have little time to spare. Mr. Blinken’s stark warning underscores the high stakes facing the West as the theocratic regime in Tehran disregards warnings from Washington and races toward status as a nuclear power.</p> <p>An Iran equipped with nuclear bombs would be a national security and foreign policy nightmare for the U.S. and its long-standing regional ally Israel. Such a development also would reshape the balance of power in the Middle East and immediately make Iran the region’s most influential player.</p>

Against that grim backdrop, Mr. Blinken said the U.S. and its allies are considering options, presumably including military action, if diplomacy is unsuccessful and Iran's nuclear program reaches a more dangerous phase.

"We still believe diplomacy is the best path forward for putting the nuclear program back in the box that had been in under the agreement, the so-called JCPOA. But we were also looking at, as necessary, other options if Iran is not prepared to engage quickly in good faith, to pick up where we left off in June," Mr. Blinken said.

"Every option is on the table, but here's what's important: Iran, unfortunately, is moving forward aggressively with its program. The time it would take for it to produce enough fissile material for one nuclear weapon is getting shorter and shorter," he said. "The other thing that's getting shorter is the runway we have, where, if we do get back into compliance with the agreement, and Iran gets back into compliance, we actually recapture all of the benefits of the agreement. Iran is learning enough, doing enough, so that that's starting to be a problem."

President Trump pulled the U.S. out of the JCPOA in 2018. He said the deal didn't do enough to stop Iran's uranium enrichment efforts.

Mr. Trump and fellow Republicans also have maintained that any agreement with Iran must address other behavior, such as Tehran's continued support of terrorism. The regime is financially backing groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah.

Iran also supports militias that regularly target American troops stationed in Iraq and Syria. Republicans say the Biden administration has not done enough to hold Iran to account for those attacks.

During a speech in Washington last week, former Vice President Mike Pence argued that Mr. Biden has emboldened Iran and its leaders.

"Our greatest hope must always be for a peaceful, cooperative and harmonious coexistence with Iran and all the sovereign nations of the region and the world. The United States will always be ready to embrace peace with all who seek it. But peace follows strength," Mr. Pence said at the event Thursday. The event was organized by the National Council of Resistance of Iran, a leading dissident group that has long called for regime change in Iran.

He also hit the White House for its response to a massive rocket bombardment against Israel this year by Hamas, a terrorist group that receives financing from Tehran.

"And with our current administration's embrace with the JCPOA, their hesitation to condemn rockets being fired at our cherished ally Israel, the heartbreaking and disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan, our adversaries may be sensing weakness in the current American administration," the former vice president said. "They may be emboldened to test our resolve. And, in fact, they've already begun to do so with reports of an Iranian drone attack on a U.S. base in Syria.

"Weakness arouses evil," Mr. Pence said.

The administration has taken action to push back on those attacks.

The White House last week imposed economic sanctions on two entities and four individuals connected to drone attacks by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, including attacks against U.S. forces.

It's unclear whether the administration is prepared to make that issue part of new talks with Iran or whether the White House will continue its policy of keeping nuclear negotiations separate from other matters.

Meanwhile, Mr. Blinken stressed that the other signatories of the JCPOA — Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China — are united in the effort to revive the agreement and reimpose limits of Iran’s nuclear ambitions. Multilateral talks are expected to resume soon in Vienna, though an exact date has not been set.

The earlier round of talks ended in June when Mr. Raisi, a noted hard-liner, took office.

In a joint statement over the weekend, the U.S., Britain, France and Germany told Mr. Raisi that his country still has a window of opportunity.

“We call upon President Raisi to seize this opportunity and return to a good faith effort to conclude our negotiations as a matter of urgency,” the leaders of those four countries said in their communique. “That is the only sure way to avoid a dangerous escalation, which is not in any country’s interest.”

Iranian officials have confirmed that talks are set to resume, but they blasted the most recent round of U.S. sanctions and suggested that those sanctions will make talks with the Biden administration more difficult.

“Such U.S. measures are in continuation of the Trump administration’s failed ‘maximum pressure’ policy and the country’s unlawful and cruel sanctions,” Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said Friday. “These pressures and sanctions will fail to undermine the Islamic Republic of Iran’s determination to defend [its] security and peace of the noble Iranian people. Tehran will continue the path of sustainable economic development with strength.”

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HEADLINE	10/31 China economy stalls; corporate debt
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/chinas-economy-slows-beijing-wrestles-debt-80896382
GIST	<p>BEIJING -- China’s economic rebound from the coronavirus pandemic is stalling as President Xi Jinping’s government cracks down on surging corporate debt.</p> <p>For a decade, the ruling Communist Party has talked about shifting to economy based on spending by 1.4 billion consumers instead of on building factories and apartments. But with each slowdown, Beijing fell back on pepping up growth with more construction and borrowing.</p> <p>Finally, Xi’s government is confronting the problem by clamping down on borrowing by a real estate industry that supports millions of jobs.</p> <p>That is sending shockwaves through the economy. Businesses and households are jittery as housing sales and construction slump. That is chilling auto and retail sales. It has possible global repercussions as China buys less steel and other building materials.</p> <p>“Many customers would like to wait and see,” said Liang Qiming, a salesman for online real estate broker 5i5j.com in Nanchang, a southern provincial capital that was turned into a boomtown by a flurry of construction over the past two decades.</p> <p>China became the world’s factory, but the bigger power driving its economic boom was a construction frenzy that took off in the late 1990s. Developers and local governments poured borrowed money into blanketing the country with new apartments, office towers, shopping malls, bridges and railways.</p> <p>Xi’s government appears to be willing to accept a politically painful slowdown to get that debt under control and achieve the longer-term goal of self-sustaining, safer growth.</p> <p>Beijing “doesn’t want growth at all costs, followed by the likely or inevitable financial market crash, which is very much the sort of European-U.S. model,” said Robert Carnell, head of Asia research for ING.</p>

Financial markets are on edge about whether one of the biggest developers, Evergrande Group, might be allowed to collapse under 2 trillion yuan (\$310 billion) in debt as a warning to others.

Beijing wants to make sure families receive apartments sold to them by Evergrande before they were built, as is common in China, economists say. But they say it is trying to avoid sending the wrong message by bailing out the company.

Evergrande is a “pre-emptive cleanup,” Carnell said.

China revived from the coronavirus pandemic earlier than the United States, Europe or Japan, but that rebound quickly flattened out.

Depressed by the building slump, the economy expanded just 4.9% over a year earlier in the three months ending in September much weaker than the previous quarter’s 7.9% growth. Compared with the previous quarter — the way other major economies are measured — growth in the three months ending in September fell to 0.2%, among the weakest of the past decade.

Housing sales fell 32% in September from a year earlier. Buyers were put off by curbs on mortgage lending and anxiety about whether developers might fail to deliver apartments paid for in advance. That means less spending on furniture and appliances.

With no sign Beijing will ease up, forecasters expect the economy to weaken further, since consumers who are reluctant to spend won’t fill the gap left by lower investment.

This quarter’s growth might fall as low as 3% over a year ago, according to Nomura. Bank of America cut its full-year forecast from 8% to 7.7%, which still would be among the world’s strongest. It slashed next year’s outlook from 5.3% to just 4%.

The total owed by companies, households and the government rose to almost the equivalent of three times annual economic output last year from 270% in 2018 — high for a middle-income country.

Xi affirmed his priorities at an August planning meeting, calling for “high-quality development” and “forestalling major financial risks,” according to the official Xinhua News Agency.

“China is in the middle of a transformation from growth driven by blind investments to high-quality growth,” said Zuo Xiaolei, an economist in Beijing.

Regulators tightened control over use of debt by real estate developers last year. Hundreds already had gone bankrupt following other restrictions imposed since 2017.

Tightening control, Beijing on Oct. 15 declared 19 of China’s biggest banks that account for three-quarters of their industry’s assets to be “domestic systemically important banks” that will face closer government scrutiny and lending controls.

A midsize developer, Modern Land (China) Co., announced it failed to pay off on a \$250 million bond due Oct. 25. Earlier, another developer, Fantasia Holdings Group, missed a \$205.7 million payment to bondholders due Oct 5.

Evergrande has caused more anxiety due to its vast debt, which includes \$18 billion owed to foreign bondholders.

It failed to make a bond payment due Sept. 23. An official newspaper said the company avoided being declared in default by wiring \$83.5 million for the payment on Oct. 22, one day before the end of a 30-day grace period.

	<p>“The risk of a sharper slowdown in real estate activity can’t be ruled out,” Tommy Wu of Oxford Economics said in a report.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the economy also faces headwinds from power rationing imposed in major manufacturing areas to meet official efficiency goals. Automakers and other factories have been disrupted by shortages of processor chips.</p> <p>Auto sales plunged 16.5% in September from a year earlier, according to the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers.</p> <p>Buyers are uneasy about the pandemic and economic outlook, said Chu Xianwu, who sells Jeeps at Shandong Xinju Auto trading Co. in the eastern city of Jinan. He said sales there were down 20% from six months ago.</p> <p>“I really hope the situation will improve in the near future,” Chu said.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/31 Hong Kong trial for Tiananmen vigil
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/hong-kong-activists-trial-banned-tiananmen-vigil-80897661
GIST	<p>HONG KONG -- A trial began Monday for Hong Kong tycoon Jimmy Lai and seven other pro-democracy activists charged over their roles in an unauthorized Tiananmen vigil last year, amid a crackdown on political dissent in Hong Kong.</p> <p>Lai and the seven others, which includes Lee Cheuk-yan, the former chairman of the now-defunct Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China, face charges of organizing, participating and inciting others to take part in the unauthorized candlelight vigil commemorating the bloody 1989 crackdown on protesters in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square.</p> <p>The eight whose trial started Monday previously pleaded not guilty to the charges against them. Their trial is expected to last 10 days.</p> <p>Police last year banned the annual vigil for the first time in three decades, citing public health risks from the coronavirus pandemic. Critics believe the ban is part of the crackdown on opposition in the semi-autonomous Chinese territory following months of anti-government protests in 2019.</p> <p>More than a dozen activists turned up at the June 4 vigil last year despite the ban, and thousands followed suit, breaking through barriers in spite of police warnings. They set up around Victoria Park to light candles and sing songs.</p> <p>Police later arrested and charged 26 activists over the vigil, including members of the Hong Kong Alliance that organizes the annual vigil.</p> <p>The Hong Kong Alliance disbanded in September, amid accusations from the government that the organization was working for foreign interests. Leaders of the alliance categorically denied the accusations.</p> <p>Of the 26 activists arrested, 16 of them including prominent Hong Kong activist Joshua Wong have pleaded guilty and were handed jail sentences ranging between four to 10 months. Three were given suspended sentences.</p> <p>Two other activists in the case, Nathan Law and Sunny Cheung, have fled the city.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/31 Brazil: 9 firefighters killed; cave collapse
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SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/brazil-firefighters-dead-cave-collapsed-training-exercise/story?id=80893721
GIST	<p>Nine Brazil firefighters were killed in a cave collapse during a training exercise Sunday, officials said.</p> <p>The Sao Paulo Military Firemen Department confirmed to ABC News that 28 firefighters were training in a cave on the Gruta Duas Bocas trail near Altinópolis in São Paulo, Brazil, when the roof of the cave collapsed.</p> <p>An emergency response was launched at 11:30 a.m. local time Sunday, the department said.</p> <p>Nine of the firefighters died and several were injured. One is still hospitalized with non-life-threatening injuries.</p> <p>Handout picture released from Sao Paulo State's Military Police on October 31, 2021 sh...Read More</p> <p>The rescue operation is complete and there are no more victims, the department said.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/31 King Co. speeds up rental assistance
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/real-estate/king-county-speeds-up-rental-assistance-but-with-thousands-in-need-some-worry-it-still-wont-be-enough/
GIST	<p>Audrina Garcia looked over a King County staffer's shoulder on a chilly October afternoon in Kent as the two worked through a rent assistance application. Garcia estimates her family is 10 months behind on rent, amounting to about \$20,000. She takes a deep breath.</p> <p>"Just saying it out loud freaks me out," Garcia said.</p> <p>Like Garcia, millions of tenants across the United States fell behind on rent during the pandemic and are still struggling to catch up. Rent assistance is a linchpin of the government's response: billions of dollars in federal funds meant to keep renters in their homes and help landlords cover their expenses even as the economic toll of the pandemic lingers. But local governments across the country have been slow to get that money to renters and landlords.</p> <p>After lagging for months, King County has now begun a turnaround in getting millions of those dollars out the door, thanks in part to paperwork changes and in-person outreach like what the county did in Kent.</p> <p>King County has spent about \$61 million, or nearly half, of \$123 million in available funds from the latest round of federal funding and the amount paid each week is increasing. Another \$22 million is going primarily to nonprofits for outreach and to some smaller administrative costs.</p> <p>For months, frustrated landlords had urged King County to speed up its spending. Now, "the money is moving. We've seen some great progress," said Brett Waller, director of government affairs for the Washington Multi-Family Housing Association, which represents landlords.</p> <p>Many tenants and landlords are still waiting. Nearly 34,000 renters in King County have expressed a need for rent assistance. County payments have so far covered rent for about 6,100, and 21,800 applications are still in the process.</p> <p>South King County hardest hit</p> <p>Sitting on the concrete stairs of the Kent apartment complex, county program manager Kishan Scipio helps Garcia with her application. Garcia shares a three-bedroom apartment with her husband and four young children. The rent started to pile up when her husband was laid off from his roofing job in December, she said. She has since picked up full-time work, but the debt still looms.</p> <p>If she's approved, King County can pay her landlord up to nine months of her back rent, plus three months of future rent. In exchange, the landlord would agree to forgive any pandemic debt beyond nine months.</p>

“I’m still in shock that this is all happening right now,” Garcia said of the assistance program. “It’s pretty mind-blowing.”

County governments across the state are racing against the clock to administer assistance programs. The state’s [partial eviction moratorium](#) is set to expire Sunday, but some cities like Seattle have their own eviction bans still in place.

The pandemic has not hit everyone equally. Across the Seattle area, 53,000 renters are still not caught up on rent, and Black and Hispanic or Latino renters are more likely to report being behind, according to a recent census survey. The highest concentrations of applications for King County rent assistance are in some of the county’s poorest and most diverse areas, such as Tukwila, Skyway and Kent. In those areas, 10% or more of households have applied for rent assistance.

Now, new challenges are arising.

King County expected applications for help to level off this fall but saw 10,000 new applications for rent assistance in the past five weeks. The amount paid to each household is also higher than the county projected.

If those trends continue, King County could run out of money with thousands of people still in the lurch, Leo Flor, director of the Department of Community and Human Services, told county lawmakers this week.

Door to door

Gino White grabs his MacBook and hops in a beige golf cart to make the rounds at a sprawling apartment complex in Federal Way.

Knock. No answer. Knock. No answer.

When one tenant is reluctant to come to the door, White asks for just five minutes. He quickly ticks through the questions on the county form: Have you experienced financial hardship due to the pandemic? Are you behind on rent? “Do you make less than this amount?” he asks, pointing to the page.

The tenant checks the box and signs. White, who is with a small outreach organization called Generosity on the Go, moves on to the next apartment on his list.

Executive Director Chene White tracks tenants in a color-coded spreadsheet, following up with them on her personal cellphone if her team can’t reach them in person. A county translation line helps tenants with limited English.

“We are working with so many different populations of people in different age ranges,” she said. “Explaining things over the phone only helps so much.”

The federal government made the process easier after local governments lagged in distributing rent assistance this summer. In [August](#), the Treasury Department told local governments they could use self-attestation forms, rather than waiting for detailed financial information from tenants and landlords. They could also pay landlords a portion of their assistance before their full application process is finished.

The change has made a dramatic difference, county and nonprofit workers say. To qualify, tenants must make less than \$40,500 for a single person, about 50% of the area’s median income. Paperwork requirements bogged down the system, they said, especially requiring tenants to furnish proof of their income such as tax documents.

But completing the paperwork can still be a hurdle for tenants with little access to the internet or limited English skills. The long process of getting aid and multiple organizations involved can be confusing.

Some landlords have also been [hesitant to agree to the county's terms](#), which [narrow their ability](#) to raise rent or evict if they accept the assistance.

"A lot of tenants are scared. I've knocked on several doors and they thought that I'm telling them to leave, which I wasn't," said Amanda Scott, who leads Northwest Behavioral Guides and does tenant outreach. "I'm actually doing the opposite. I'm trying to help."

An ongoing need

Across Washington, jobless claims are on the decline and the state is [inching toward economic recovery](#).

But with median rents in King County approaching [\\$2,000 a month](#), debt quickly racked up when renters fell behind. Before the pandemic, [more than 1 in 5](#) King County renters spent more than half of their income on housing, meaning an unexpected expense or drop in income could have dire consequences.

"They may have lost their job during COVID. That put them in crisis. They're getting back on their feet, but that's going to be a slow recovery," said Sarah Gallagher, a senior project director at the National Low Income Housing Coalition.

Nationally, about 8.4 million renters were behind on rent in [early October](#).

Yet, of the \$25 billion approved by Congress in last [December's stimulus package](#), state and local governments have spent about [48%](#), according to the NLIHC.

So far, a national flood of evictions [has not materialized](#), but the problems that predated the pandemic persist.

"There is just not enough affordable rental housing for those who need it," Gallagher said. "Until we address that problem ... we're going to continue to have a housing crisis."

Here in King County, officials projected each household getting rent assistance would need about \$8,000. But so far, the county is paying about \$11,000 to pay off each family's back rent because tenants owe more months of back rent than the county expected, said Flor, director of the human services department.

If applications hold steady at their current level, the county should be able to cover those who have applied and qualify for help, Flor said. But if another 10,000 applications arrive in the next month without additional funding, thousands could be left without help, Flor said.

At the Kent apartment complex, a tenant missed rent when she had to miss work at her job as a cook several times because of potential COVID-19 exposure. After experiencing homelessness before, she worried she could end up on the streets again.

"I just kept getting more behind and more behind," said the tenant, who asked to use only her initials, A.B., to discuss her financial situation.

She learned about the county assistance program when she got a notice on her door. "I think it's a big opportunity for a lot of people. A new beginning, a fresh start," she said.

Vickey Stepney, another tenant at the Kent apartment complex, learned from an outreach worker she qualifies for four months of assistance, three of them to cover future rent. Unable to work as she recovers from back surgery, Stepney said she tries hard to stay up on her expenses. "If I don't have \$1 left, I pay all my bills," she said.

But the assistance will get her caught up and "help me get up on my feet," she said. "It will be a little relief."

HEADLINE	10/31 Covid vaccines rolled out in WA 10mo. ago
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/covid-vaccines-were-rolled-out-10-months-ago-in-washington-state-where-do-we-stand-now/
GIST	<p>More than 300 days ago Dr. Thuan Ong got the COVID-19 vaccine. The moment remains a vivid memory.</p> <p>Ong, who specializes in geriatric medicine at Harborview Medical Center, was one of the first people in the state to take the Pfizer shot after it arrived in dry-ice cooled boxes in December.</p> <p>He welled up as he watched 12 fellow front-line medical workers finally become immunized against a disease they'd spent months on the front lines fighting. Speaking to reporters, they talked about fatigue and shared hope and concern with the vaccine's arrival, unaware at that point the journey would continue for months longer.</p> <p>Ong told himself he wasn't going to cry when it was his turn, but when he thought about the scarcity of vaccines and felt a wave of gratitude, tears came.</p> <p>"I lost it at that point," he said. "I got my shot, then went to the back and just bawled and cried. ... We were desperate."</p> <p>Now, more than 4.7 million people, or 72.5% of eligible Washingtonians, have been fully vaccinated. But infectious disease experts say the story of COVID vaccines is far from over.</p> <p>The first year of vaccines brought a significant reprieve in fighting the spread of the virus that causes COVID, saving thousands of lives, reducing hospitalizations and allowing businesses and restaurants to largely reopen in Washington state. The year was also marked by deep anger and confusion in more rural parts of the state, fueled by widespread vaccination requirements, as well as the devastating summer of the delta variant that prompted new spikes in infections and hospitalized a record number of people, the vast majority unvaccinated.</p> <p>As we head into yet another winter of unknowns, proof of vaccination will soon be required at most indoor restaurants and bars and large outdoor venues statewide. Booster shots and additional vaccine doses are available.</p> <p>And as soon as this week, the nation will likely receive more news about immunizations for many of the youngest people in society.</p> <p>With the move, 28 million more Americans could be further protected.</p> <p>Booster or third shot</p> <p>Ong said he never expected the year to unfold as it did, or that a month ago, he'd be receiving another vaccine shot.</p> <p>He's among more than 363,000 Washingtonians who have received an additional dose of vaccine — either a booster or a third shot — according to the state Department of Health. The department declined to give further information about which age groups or counties have received the most boosters.</p> <p>At a UW Medicine vaccine clinic on First Hill this month, health care workers cheerfully welcomed a steady stream of people who lined up to receive their boosters.</p> <p>Marilyn Morgan, a Greenwood resident who got a Pfizer booster, said widespread vaccinations, particularly boosters, have eased her anxiety as the world approaches a second winter of COVID.</p> <p>"I think it's important to look out for each other," Morgan said as she sat in the waiting area of the clinic. "I just feel like [the virus] is a part of our life now. ... and I wanted the extra feeling of feeling safe."</p>

Another recent booster-getter at the First Hill clinic, 54-year-old Eric Rindy, opted for Moderna. He received a pair of Pfizer shots this spring.

“We’re going to mix and match,” said Rindy, who said he has health care providers in his family. “I’ve seen a lot of good data on the antibodies being produced.”

In the past few months, the Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have rolled out a succession of booster guidelines. After authorizing the Pfizer boosters for older adults and those at high risk of becoming severely ill with COVID in late September, the agencies approved Moderna and Johnson & Johnson’s versions.

Although the FDA and CDC initially recommended against mixing and matching vaccinations, the agencies this month announced new data showing it’s safe for people to receive a different COVID vaccine as a booster than the one they initially received. The change came after researchers found that recipients of J&J’s single-dose shot who received a Moderna booster saw their antibody levels rise 76-fold in 15 days, compared with only a fourfold increase after an extra dose of J&J.

Are you eligible for a COVID booster shot?

Those who received a Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine are eligible for a booster six months after getting their second dose, as long as they’re 65 or older, or anyone who’s 18 or older and lives in a long-term care facility, lives or works in a “high-risk setting,” or has underlying medical conditions.

Those eligible for a booster can choose whichever shot they’d like. Pfizer and J&J boosters are both full doses, while the Moderna booster is a half dose.

Researchers have suggested J&J recipients might benefit most from a Moderna booster, according to a study conducted by the National Institutes of Health and presented to the FDA’s advisory panel this month. A shot of the Pfizer vaccine also raised the antibody levels of J&J recipients more than J&J boosters did, though not as much as Moderna, the study found.

A Moderna booster also raised antibody levels in Pfizer recipients higher than a third injection of Pfizer’s vaccine, while a Pfizer booster raised antibody levels in Moderna recipients about as high as a third Moderna shot.

Experts, however, have reminded the public that the new data was based on small groups of volunteers and short-term findings — and warned against using the findings to conclude that any one combination of vaccines was better.

“At least people have that full range of options,” said Jennifer Hernandez, a nurse manager for Harborview’s vaccine sites and mobile clinics.

Childhood vaccinations

While Hernandez said she’s thrilled that boosters are here, one of her main priorities remains vaccine education for those who haven’t yet received a shot — a task more urgent now that she and her team are preparing for the long-awaited vaccine rollout for children ages 5 to 11. Michele Roberts, the state Department of Health’s acting assistant secretary, said Washington expects about 316,000 doses of kid-sized Pfizer COVID vaccines to arrive in the state by the end of this week, pending federal authorization.

The FDA [approved the kid-sized dose](#), one-third the size of the adult Pfizer dose, Friday afternoon, leaving just one more hurdle before the shots are rolled out. On Tuesday, the CDC’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices will make more detailed recommendations on which youngsters should get vaccinated, with a final decision by the agency’s director expected shortly afterward.

The federal government has allocated about 230,000 doses for Washington health care providers, while an additional 86,000 doses are expected to arrive at pharmacies through the federal pharmacy program, Roberts said.

She said she expects kids could start being vaccinated by the end of the week.

Of the about 680,000 children in the state's 5- to 11-year-old population, Roberts said, she believes about 30% of parents will seek shots for their children.

Plans for inoculating children have been in the works for weeks.

At Hernandez's First Hill vaccine clinic, they're setting up a separate pediatric room, where anxious kids can lie down and calm their nerves before or after getting their shot. Hernandez said they're also working on getting TVs and candy stations set up.

"Our idea is just to fast track all of these kids," she said. "We make it quick. We don't prolong it."

Seattle Children's is [also preparing to vaccinate thousands of kids](#).

Odessa Brown Children's Center — Seattle Children's community health center in the Central District — will soon offer mass pediatric vaccination clinics on Saturdays, as well as partner with school districts, local community groups, places of worship and Black-owned businesses to get kids immunized, said Dr. Shaquita Bell, Odessa Brown's interim senior medical director.

While Bell and her team are experienced in giving children vaccines, she offered some advice for families and caretakers in preparing their kids for the shots.

"It's really important to be honest," she said. "And not try and trick your child."

Offer very literal reasoning, she advised — "Do this to protect your little sister or brother," or "If you want to go to a concert or movie, you have to get the vaccine." Talk to them about what's going to happen. Try to give them books or stickers when they get their shot to take their minds off the sting.

A large part of Bell's excitement for approval for childhood vaccinations is centered on keeping kids in in-person school.

"The idea that we're going to be able to make school that much safer is another really added benefit," she said. "We've already seen the benefit of in-person schools."

Vaccine, testing requirements

Vaccine requirements have slowly ramped up throughout the state as the first year of COVID shots has unfolded.

State government, health care and school employees must be vaccinated or have an approved religious or medical exemption if they want to keep their jobs. Compliance numbers have fluctuated since the mandate deadline this month, but so far 56,866 government workers, or 93% of remaining workers, had provided proof of vaccination or had an approved exemption. More than 88% of the state's hospital workers have also met the requirements. About 89% of school staff statewide have complied.

Last week, a new King County rule went into effect, requiring patrons to show proof of COVID vaccination or a recent negative test to dine-in at bars and restaurants, work out in gyms and enjoy indoor entertainment venues.

The new rule also applies to conferences and conventions, and any large outdoor gatherings with more than 500 people.

Many Seattle-area restaurant and bar owners were [already requiring proof of vaccination or a negative test for dine-in customers](#) and were happy to comply, but other businesses say they've lost customers because of the requirement and don't want another regulation they say could hurt small businesses.

Statewide, large indoor and outdoor events will next month start requiring all attendees to provide proof of vaccination or a recent negative coronavirus test. The order, which goes into effect Nov. 15, will apply to all indoor events with 1,000 or more attendees and all outdoor events with more than 10,000 attendees, including conventions, concerts, sporting events, fairs and theme parks, [Gov. Jay Inslee announced this month](#).

Some venues have put new practices into place to comply with the mandate. Lumen Field, for example, is partnering with Safeway to hold vaccination and rapid-testing sites outside the stadium before Seahawks games.

In general, however, access to rapid testing remains a challenge, said Donna Hansel, a professor and chair of Pathology & Laboratory Medicine at Oregon Health and Science University, in [a recent webinar](#) (co-hosted by the M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust and The Seattle Times).

In comparing antigen to PCR rapid tests, Hansel said antigen tests have a sensitivity range of 60 to 70% — lower than PCR tests — but are very accurate if they return positive.

“If you’re negative by an antigen test, you really need to follow that up with a PCR, especially if you’re having symptoms,” she said.

Preparing for the winter

As has been the case with much of the pandemic, uncertainty lies ahead, especially as colder temperatures keep people inside, where there’s less room for distancing, and other respiratory viruses emerge, infectious disease experts say. But they’re more optimistic than they were last year.

“Pending the emergence of a new type of delta, for example, or something that really does break through the immune protection we have from vaccines, I anticipate people will be more into a groove,” Hansel said during her recent COVID webinar.

We know what to do to keep each other safe, though questions remain about who can and will choose to follow those measures, said Dr. Larry Corey, a scientist at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle who participated in the webinar.

“We’ve developed countermeasures,” Corey said. “And it’s the deployment of the countermeasures — vaccination being one of them, masking being the second one — that will determine [the future of the pandemic].”

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HEADLINE	10/31 American Airlines cancels 1,500+ flights
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2021/10/31/business/american-airlines-cancels-flights-sunday/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)American Airlines canceled another 634 flights on Sunday, more than 12% of its total operations for the day, the company said Sunday.</p> <p>The airline has now canceled more than 1,500 flights since Friday, as it deals with weather issues and staffing shortages that started last week.</p> <p>"With additional weather throughout the system, our staffing begins to run tight as crew members end up out of their regular flight sequences," American said in a statement to CNN on Saturday.</p> <p>Two days of severe winds in Dallas-Fort Worth, its largest hub, sharply reduced arrival capacity, the company said.</p> <p>The airline canceled 543 flights Saturday according to flight tracking website FlightAware. American reported 4,967 flights had been scheduled on Saturday.</p>

	<p>On Friday, FlightAware showed 738 flights, or almost a quarter of American's mainline operations, were delayed and 342 flights were canceled.</p> <p>As air travel plunged in early 2020, airlines offered buyouts and early retirement packages to employees in order to cut costs. As they try to hire, or rehire, workers, service disruptions have become more frequent.</p> <p>American expects more flight crews will return during the holiday season. The airline said 1,800 flight attendants will return from leave Monday and more will be back on the job by December 1. The airline said it is also increasing hiring in the fourth quarter.</p> <p>As demand for air travel ramps up, other airlines also have had difficulty returning to normal operations. Southwest had an operational meltdown one weekend earlier in October, canceling more than 2,000 weekend flights.</p> <p>The company blamed the move on air traffic control problems and limited staffing in Florida as well as bad weather, saying getting its operations back to normal was "more difficult and prolonged" because of schedule and staffing reductions implemented during the pandemic.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/29 Some hospitals battle burnout w/bonuses
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/washington-state-hospitals-bonuses-combat-burnout-pandemic/281-18fbd4d8-df1b-4d53-8696-e3305bd20c9b
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash. — Providence Southwest Washington Chief Executive Darin Goss does not know how many of his employees have quit during the pandemic, but it's been at a higher rate than the hospitals ever saw before the virus hit.</p> <p>"We have seen burnout here," said Goss.</p> <p>To combat the turnover, Goss said Providence has taken steps to make the network of hospitals and medical offices in Washington a better place to work.</p> <p>Every employee is getting a \$1,000 bonus this fall, new hires can qualify for signing bonuses up to \$20,000, and employees who refer a candidate who is hired for a position can earn up to a \$7,500 bonus.</p> <p>"Money plays a big role in this, but also its wellness resources," said Goss, who said Providence is also offering better child care subsidies, more mental health counseling and additional emergency paid time off.</p> <p>MultiCare Health Systems is also giving every employee below vice president levels a \$1,000 bonus and all non-union employees will receive a 2.5% bump in pay.</p> <p>In addition to burnout, the Washington State Hospital Association (WSHA) said hospitals are dealing with what could be a 2% to 5% loss in staff because of the state's COVID-19 vaccine mandate for health care workers.</p> <p>"It is clear staffing remains constrained across the health care system and the loss of staff will have an impact on patients," said Cassie Sauer, the WSHA CEO.</p> <p>She said the job losses could delay procedures and outpatient services.</p> <p>Providence St. Peter Emergency Center Clinical Manager Arthur Edwards said the improved benefits should help with employee morale.</p> <p>"I think those kinds of things do make a difference," said Edwards, who is also a registered nurse who has filled in on nursing shifts during the pandemic.</p>

	<p>He said supporting employees, financially and emotionally, is something that could help those trying to stay motivated.</p> <p>"We're hitting the two-year mark here soon, when you start looking at that next wave you start seeing some people going, 'I don't know if this is the right place for me anymore.'"</p>
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HEADLINE	10/30 Statewide eviction moratorium ends
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/statewide-eviction-moratorium-end/OOZLLMYA5BCFJGQ2ODY3MJU3BY/
GIST	<p>Protections against evictions in Washington end Sunday.</p> <p>The protections have been in place for the last 19 months of the pandemic.</p> <p>On Sept. 23, Inslee had extended the moratorium to give counties additional time to get rental relief money to the people who needed it.</p> <p>The federal government had sent more than a billion dollars in rental assistance to Washington state but the distribution of the funds had been slow. About 25% of that money had been given out during that time.</p> <p>Gov. Jay Inslee confirmed he does not plan to extend the state's eviction moratorium after this week. However, cities like Seattle, Kenmore and Burien have extended their own renter protections until mid-January, giving tenants and landlords more time to access rental assistance.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/31 US warns China: no unilateral action Taiwan
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/blinden-warns-china-against-unilateral-action-regarding-taiwan-2021-10-31/
GIST	<p>ROME, Oct 31 (Reuters) - U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken told his Chinese counterpart on Sunday that the United States opposed actions by China that have increased tensions across the Taiwan Strait, a senior State Department official said.</p> <p>During an hour-long meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the sidelines of a Group of 20 summit, Blinken made "crystal clear" that Washington opposes any unilateral changes by Beijing to the status quo there, the official said.</p> <p>A recent increase in Chinese military exercises in Taiwan's air defence identification zone are part of what Taipei views as stepped-up military harassment by Beijing.</p> <p>China claims the island as part of its own territory and views any foreign intervention on Taiwan as interference in its domestic affairs.</p> <p>The United States wants to manage the intense competition between the world's two largest economies responsibly, the state department official said, adding that both sides acknowledged that open lines of communication are paramount.</p> <p>While the United States, like most countries, has no formal ties with Taiwan, Washington is the island's most important international backer and main arms supplier, and is required by law to provide it with the means to defend itself.</p> <p>The United States has long followed a policy of "strategic ambiguity" on whether it would intervene militarily to protect Taiwan in the event of a Chinese attack, though U.S. President Joe Biden said last week that it would come to Taiwan's defense if necessary.</p> <p>Blinken made clear that Washington had not changed its "one China" policy regarding Taiwan, the official said.</p>

	He and Wang did not discuss a recent Chinese hypersonic weapons test that military experts say appears to show Beijing's pursuit of an Earth-orbiting system designed to evade American missile defenses, the official said.
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HEADLINE	10/30 US, allies: Iran 'provocative nuclear steps'
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/g-20-summit-joe-biden-business-france-iran-64aa2953ef23a1b201675b18997ed327
GIST	<p>ROME (AP) — President Joe Biden said Saturday that nuclear talks with Iran would resume as he and European leaders warned Tehran that “accelerated” and “provocative nuclear steps” it has taken will jeopardize its return to compliance under a 2015 nuclear agreement.</p> <p>Biden and the leaders of Germany, France and Britain met as Iran continues to enrich uranium to near-weapons-grade levels. The leaders are trying to revive the 2015 deal and restore Iran’s program to where it was under the pact, which kept the Islamic republic at least one year away from the potential to field a nuclear weapon.</p> <p>In a joint statement issued after the meeting, Biden, Germany’s Angela Merkel, France’s Emmanuel Macron and Britain’s Boris Johnson “expressed our determination to ensure that Iran can never develop or acquire a nuclear weapon.”</p> <p>The leaders shared “our grave and growing concern” that Iran “has accelerated the pace of provocative nuclear steps” after it halted negotiations on a return to the nuclear agreement, formally known as Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).</p> <p>They also warned that Iran’s nuclear developments and restrictions on international monitoring by the International Atomic Energy Agency “will jeopardize the possibility of a return to” the deal.</p> <p>As the leaders posed for photos before the closed-door talks, Biden was asked when he would like the stalled negotiations with Iran to resume.</p> <p>“They’re scheduled to resume,” he said, in what appeared to be the first public confirmation by the U.S. of a resumption in negotiations.</p> <p>Iran has yet to commit to a date to return to nuclear talks being held in Vienna but has signaled it will do so next week with a target of late November for resuming the negotiations. The U.S. and others have expressed skepticism about Iranian intentions.</p> <p>The U.N.’s atomic watchdog has said Iran is increasingly in violation of the nuclear deal, which President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. from. The U.S. has participated indirectly in talks aimed at bringing both Washington and Tehran back into compliance. Those talks in Vienna have been on hiatus since June, when Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi took power.</p> <p>Britain, France, Germany, Russia, China and the European Union remain part of the deal.</p> <p>“We call upon President Raisi to seize this opportunity and return to a good faith effort to conclude our negotiations as a matter of urgency,” the leaders said in their communique. “That is the only sure way to avoid a dangerous escalation, which is not in any country’s interest.”</p> <p>The four leaders met Saturday’ while in Rome for the Group of 20 summit, the first stop on Biden’s five-day foreign trip. He’s also attending a U.N. climate conference in Scotland.</p> <p>Biden was welcomed to the summit site by Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi and joined his counterparts for the customary “family photo” before he went to the opening plenary session on the COVID-19 pandemic and economic recovery.</p>

Saturday's meeting came several days after Ali Bagheri, Iran's deputy foreign minister and chief negotiator for the talks, tweeted that Iran has agreed to restart negotiations by the end of November. Bagheri said a date to resume talks would be announced soon.

U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan said Thursday that the U.S. was still trying to determine whether Iran was serious about returning to the negotiations.

"We have heard positive signals that they are, but I think we have to wait and see when and whether they actually show up at the negotiating table," he told reporters Thursday aboard Air Force One as Biden flew to Rome.

Sullivan said the leaders would send "clear messages" to Iran that the window for negotiation "is not unlimited."

"We, of course, retain all other options to be able to deal with this program as necessary," he said.

Saturday's meeting came after American officials blamed Iran for a drone attack on a remote U.S. outpost in Syria. Officials said Monday the U.S. believes Iran resourced and encouraged the attack, but that the drones were not launched from Iran.

No deaths or injuries were reported as a result of the attack.

In retaliation, the U.S. Treasury Department on Friday announced new penalties against two senior members of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps and two affiliated companies for supplying lethal drones and related material to insurgent groups in Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen and Ethiopia.

At the summit, Biden pushed for progress toward his goal of establishing a global 15% corporate minimum tax, the White House said, even as his domestic effort to raise the business rate to that figure was stuck in limbo in Washington.

He also was expected to discuss measures to ease a global energy supply crunch that has fueled rising prices, imperiling the global economic recovery. On Sunday, Biden planned to host an event on strengthening supply chains around the world as factories and ports have struggled to deliver goods because of the pandemic.

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HEADLINE	10/31 COP26 climate change summit
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/climate-science-europe-paris-scotland-eb324b733e1b76d19d6d7324d95b3e32
GIST	<p>GLASGOW, Scotland (AP) — The U.N. climate summit, known as COP26 this year, brings officials from almost 200 countries to Glasgow to haggle over the best measures to combat global warming.</p> <p>Here are some of the terms and key issues that will be discussed at the event, which is scheduled to run from Oct. 31 to Nov. 13:</p> <p>COP</p> <p>Short for Conference of the Parties to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change.</p> <p>First held in 1995, it also serves as the meeting of parties to the 1992 Kyoto Protocol that first committed countries to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and those that signed on to the 2015 Paris Agreement. Governments meeting in the French capital six years ago agreed on a target of keeping global warming below 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit), ideally no more than 1.5C (2.7F), by the end of this century compared with pre-industrial times.</p>

More than 25,000 delegates are registered for the event this year. It will be chaired by British official Alok Sharma.

HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT

More than 100 world leaders will attend the start of the summit Monday and Tuesday, known as the high-level segment, including U.S. President Joe Biden and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

Germany's Angela Merkel, who presided over the first COP, will make one of her last international trips as chancellor, while Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also expected to attend in person.

Queen Elizabeth II and Pope Francis have canceled their trips to Glasgow, while Chinese President Xi Jinping, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro are not scheduled to go but may deliver speeches by video link.

NDCs

The Paris accord set a target for limiting global warming but left it up to each country to submit its own emissions reduction targets, known as Nationally Determined Contributions.

Part of the plan was for countries to regularly review and, if necessary, update their targets to ensure the Paris goal is met.

Governments were required to submit their new NDCs five years after Paris, but that deadline was quietly pushed back a year because of the coronavirus pandemic.

PARIS RULEBOOK

Countries had hoped to finalize the so-called Paris rulebook a few years after the accord was signed, but some elements of the agreement remain unfinished.

They include how countries collect and report their greenhouse gas emissions in a transparent way and how to regulate global carbon markets.

CLIMATE FINANCE

Among the top issues at COP26 is the question of how poor countries will afford the expense of ditching cheap fossil fuels in favor of renewable energy while adapting to the inevitable effects of global warming already "baked into" the atmosphere.

There is a consensus that rich nations, whose greenhouse gas emissions are largely responsible for climate change, have to pay up. The question is how much.

JUST TRANSITION

Many governments have stressed that finding 'green' jobs for millions of people working in the fossil fuel industry is a challenge.

This is true for developing countries as well as for rich nations such as the United States, where coal mines and oil fields are major employers in otherwise economically depressed regions.

CARBON SINKS

Trees, wetlands and oceans are constantly removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

	<p>Calculating how much CO2 is absorbed and stored by these carbon sinks is a key part of the climate change equation.</p> <p>Some countries believe they can balance out much of their emissions using their own natural resources; scientists and environmental campaigners are skeptical about the idea.</p> <p>THE GRETA FACTOR</p> <p>Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg has said she doesn't want to be the center of attention and other campaigners from developing countries should be heard too.</p> <p>But Thunberg, who inspired the Fridays for Future youth rallies, was mobbed like a rock star by fans and journalists Saturday as she arrived in Glasgow by train.</p> <p>U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres acknowledged that mass climate protests have put pressure on world leaders to take the issue more seriously,</p> <p>"Keep pushing for action," he told a youth conference Saturday.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/29 Prices, wages fastest rise in decades
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/consumer-spending-personal-income-inflation-september-2021-11635449959?mod=hp_major_pos1#cxrecs_s
GIST	<p>Consumer prices rose at the fastest pace in 30 years in September while workers saw their biggest compensation boosts in at least 20 years, according to new government data released Friday.</p> <p>Consumer spending also rose in September despite the expiration of enhanced unemployment benefits, the data showed.</p> <p>The reports point to a recovery caught between robust consumer demand and severe supply shortages, leading to a rapid uptick in inflation. They also put pressure on Federal Reserve officials as they prepare to meet next week.</p> <p>Persistently high inflation could offset the increase in wages and make households worse off.</p> <p>It could also force the central bank to raise interest rates to keep prices in check. Such a move also risks slowing the economic recovery when the unemployment rate remains higher than it was before the pandemic.</p> <p>Officials say they expect the recent burst of inflation will be temporary, but they have also raised the possibility they could pull back support for the economy faster than anticipated.</p> <p>"This is a really rough ride for the next few months," said Ian Shepherdson, chief economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics.</p> <p>The Fed's preferred inflation gauge, the personal-consumption-expenditures price index, rose 4.4% in September from the previous year, the fastest pace since 1991, the Commerce Department said Friday. The index was up 0.3% in September from the previous month.</p> <p>Excluding food and energy categories, which tend to be more volatile, the index rose 0.2% over the month and 3.6% over the year.</p> <p>The employment-cost index, a measure of worker compensation that includes both wages and benefits, rose 1.3% in the third quarter from the second, the fastest pace since at least 2001, the Labor Department reported.</p>

Workers in the leisure, hospitality and retail sectors saw particularly high compensation boosts, as employers struggled to fill open positions.

An index of consumer sentiment also released Friday by the University of Michigan showed Americans remain in a glum mood. The index fell to 71.7 in October from 72.8 in September. It remains well below the level of 101 registered in February 2020, before the pandemic hit.

Consumers in October also anticipated the highest year-ahead inflation rate since 2008 at 4.8%, according to the sentiment survey. Higher consumer inflation expectations are a concern for policy makers because they could prompt firms and workers to raise prices and salary demands in the future, making the expectations self-fulfilling.

Constrained global supply chains have made it difficult for businesses and consumers to find the products they want to buy. Continued fears of the Covid-19 virus and [difficulty finding child care](#) have kept workers out of the labor force, despite rapidly rising wages.

About 62% of American adults are either working or looking for work, the lowest rate since the 1970s.

Those factors have combined to push inflation well above the Fed's 2% target. Economists say they expect inflation to remain elevated until the pandemic-related disruptions settle down, perhaps sometime next year.

Each passing month of rapidly rising consumer prices puts added pressure on Fed Chairman Jerome Powell, Mr. Shepherdson said.

"It lays out the possibility that the Fed has to move earlier, not because they're walking away from their central view but because the risks of being wrong have gone up," he said.

The central bank is expected to announce next week that it will begin paring back its asset purchases in November. Officials have penciled in an interest-rate increase next year once that tapering is complete.

"The Fed now has to navigate that very difficult transition from accommodation to tightening," said Joe Brusuelas, chief economist at RSM US LLC.

The biggest concern right now, he said, is the persistent supply problems, which could keep prices elevated.

In Madison, Wis., Benjamin Wellington has seen his appliance-repair business suffer from a shortage of parts. Those parts that are available cost more, he said. He passes on what he can to his customers.

Although he is getting more calls from customers, the shortages have prevented him from taking on as much work as he would like.

"My profits are way down because I'm not getting those completed jobs anymore," he said.

Consumer spending rose at a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 0.6% in September, down from 0.8% in August, the Commerce Department said, as higher prices, product shortages and a surge of new Covid-19 cases caused by the Delta variant tempered buying.

Personal incomes fell 1% last month, driven by a 72% decline in unemployment insurance benefits that offset a 0.7% increase in wages and benefits, the report said.

The expiration of enhanced jobless aid at the start of September forced people to rely on the savings they had built up thanks to multiple waves of government stimulus during the pandemic. The savings rate—the

	<p>share of disposable income unspent every month—fell to 7.5% in September from 9.2% in August, bringing it to a level last seen at the end of 2019, before the state of the pandemic.</p> <p>Economists say the spending slowdown will be short-lived. The decline in new Covid-19 caseloads and rising wages should keep demand elevated heading into the holiday season.</p> <p>“If Delta was a net negative for the third quarter and for September, then I think it should be a net positive for the fourth quarter,” said Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody’s Analytics. “We should see some revival.”</p> <p>On Friday IHS Markit said it expected the economy will grow at a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 5% in the fourth quarter, up from 2% in the third.</p> <p>In Raleigh, N.C., Paul Warren, a music teacher, has seen more students willing to take in-person guitar and drum lessons despite lingering fears of the virus.</p> <p>“The demand is picking up but it’s slow. Slow and steady,” he said.</p> <p>Mr. Warren used to run a music school but shut it down when pandemic-related lockdowns kept students away. Since then, he has been teaching classes online and, increasingly, face to face.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/29 Hidden risks of remote work
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/zoom-slack-remote-work-risks-11635427086?mod=hp_jr_pos3
GIST	<p>Remote-work technologies are great tools—but are they reshaping work relationships in unexpected ways? Lebene Soga thinks so.</p> <p>Trained as a pharmacist in his native Ghana, Dr. Soga noticed while a manager at a pharmaceutical plant that the machinery was shaping people’s work. Now director of the international management and business administration program at Britain’s University of Reading, he studies remote work from the same point of view.</p> <p>“I tend to look at the unintended consequences of things,” he says.</p> <p>Dr. Soga and colleagues analyzed how managers and staff interacted virtually at a Fortune 500 company, where they focused on nearly 1,200 staff members and interviewed 64 managers. Their research, conducted before and during the pandemic, found that managers see technologies such as Zoom and Slack as just a means for working together, when in fact these “tools” change the relationship between all parties using them.</p> <p>The researchers described their findings recently in the MIT Sloan Management Review, and Dr. Soga elaborated in an interview with The Wall Street Journal conducted—naturally—via Zoom. Edited excerpts follow.</p> <p>Presenting an illusion</p> <p>WSJ: <i>How do remote-work platforms like Zoom change the nature of work relationships?</i></p> <p>DR. SOGA: These technologies allow colleagues to see each other even if they are miles away. But do they really give us the opportunity of seeing each other? Or do they offer us an illusion? It is more of the latter. Work relationships built solely on the intermediation of some video communication platform begin with what’s called ritual sniffing, where people cautiously check one another out and try to put their best foot forward. Sometimes, unfortunately, such relationships don’t get any deeper over time. The relationship becomes inauthentic and doesn’t augur well for a great organizational culture. Managers must be aware of this. Entirely remote work is rarely the best option for all parties.</p>

WSJ: *These technologies have helped many of us continue working during the pandemic, but your research uncovered potential downsides. What are they?*

DR. SOGA: Virtual, tech-mediated collaboration provides many benefits to employees and managers, but it comes with four big risks: isolation, exclusion, surveillance and self-censorship.

Manager isolation

WSJ: *Working remotely can obviously be isolating for workers. But what about managers?*

DR. SOGA: I have spoken to managers who suddenly realized that they have become distant from those they are supposed to be leading. They have become isolated from their teams because they begin to use these collaborative technologies as mere transmission devices for conveying messages. This is a case of tele-leadership, almost like a military leader transmitting directives to soldiers in the field. Technology must not become the only means by which we sustain work relationships or close relational gaps.

WSJ: *It has been noted that remote workers are left out of impromptu exchanges, or can succumb to out-of-sight, out-of-mind syndrome. Which workers are most susceptible to exclusion?*

DR. SOGA: Many older workers are quite tech-savvy, but they are all by definition digital immigrants, coming from a very different world, and this can subtly exclude them—sometimes as a result of stereotyping by others. Some workers don't have suitable space at home for remote work, or have problems with connectivity or child care. Employees are excluded when their technology environment limits them in some form.

Some employees we spoke to were particularly worried about showing their room's background in video calls. We probed a bit more as to why they couldn't use the various in-built backgrounds. We were startled when one said, "These background filters are artificial, and they are an implicit admission to the world that you have an inappropriate background that shouldn't be seen by others. As a result, turning the video off altogether gives me better confidence to speak." Unfortunately, those who aren't visible are inadvertently considered as not being available or participatory enough. In fact, we had managers really not pleased that people show them blank screens. Consequently, managers turn more often to those who they believe are readily available, thus creating in-groups of those who are relied upon, while others are left out of the charmed circle.

Employees watching employees

WSJ: *Why is surveillance a problem? Haven't managers always kept an eye on workers, especially when they were in the same place?*

DR. SOGA: Surveillance is often the evil twin of transparency. And while the goal of transparency is to ensure trust, that is exactly what surveillance undermines. It isn't only managers who have surveillance ability, but employees, as well. These collaborative technologies can tell everyone who is present or who is absent, who is available or who is pretending to be available and so on. Employees are able to monitor or check on their peers—known as lateral surveillance—or check on their managers—known as bottom-up surveillance.

One individual said, "My manager was showing as offline, but she typed into the group only a few minutes ago, and I wonder who she was deceiving that she was offline? If she doesn't want to be disturbed, she could have simply asked people not to contact her today or something." The same sort of thing happens among peers, and I found that fascinating. These technologies by default leave data trails of what, when where, and how individuals are interacting, and some of that data is readily available even if the user wishes it not to be. Your only way of avoiding this is to not do anything at all, thus leading to self-censorship.

Employees also worry that their words remain on the platform forever. Individuals scared of having their errors memorialized don't participate and are thus left out. One woman, haunted by this, worried that she didn't always sound intelligent enough. "In a face-to-face situation, I can always say something and even

if it sounds stupid, I can wiggle my way out of it and afterward nobody remembers it. But in an online session, I am not sure how that would be considered when people now have the opportunity to replay it, and I don't like that feeling."

These concerns—that people are being tracked in various ways, that their words and body language might be recorded—can lead to self-censorship.

Undermining trust

WSJ: *Haven't people always had to be careful about what they say at work?*

DR. SOGA: Yes but in this case we have a situation in which employees lose their voice. Self-censorship is a consequence of the very nature of these collaborative technologies, which put you on the spot. Quite literally in a Zoom or a Teams meeting, the speaker is highlighted by the technology; on an internal communications platform, the message posted is out there for everyone to see. One employee mentioned he worried about not being able to effectively communicate due to his frequent grammatical errors and so he would rather not type on the platform even if he had something to say. In another instance, a middle manager mentioned she does not like video meetings because "everyone is watching you."

WSJ: *What effect does that have on trust in the workplace?*

DR. SOGA: It undermines trust by giving employees the feeling of being policed, and by reducing the feeling of being in control of who is watching. Surveillance is intrusive; it brings uninvited others into the personal space of the one being watched.

A surveillance culture makes people quietly question the integrity of their managers. Research shows surveillance breaks down a manager's ability to influence staff.

Overcoming distance

WSJ: *What can managers do, short of abolishing remote work, to overcome these shortcomings?*

DR. SOGA: Remote work has its advantages, and we must appreciate that. What managers must seek to overcome is the psychological and managerial distance it generates. Humans are social beings, and we will flourish best at work if we inhabit our shared humanity there. We are the best form of ourselves in communityship, and this is what we must encourage in work relationships.

WSJ: *Any concrete suggestions for nurturing a sense of community?*

DR. SOGA: Managers have to take deliberate actions to encourage voice in the organization. We find that seeking out employees for one-on-one conversation is a great way to do that. Managers should go out of their way to arrange meetups, online or in person, for casual conversation about work and nonwork issues.

And broadly speaking, the most important thing across the board with remote work is to find ways of fostering social connection. Something as simple as weekly lunches, in person or remotely, can bring managers and staff closer. You can provide training to address knowledge gaps that might cause exclusion, and also tell reticent employees you need their input during specific collaborative virtual meetings.

WSJ: *How about the problem of surveillance?*

DR. SOGA: You have to tell people what data is being generated and how it is used. And of course you should eliminate needless surveillance. Use encryption to safeguard what data you keep. And give each employee as much control as possible over data involving them. These steps can help allay fears and build trust.

WSJ: *Can firms sustain and extend their culture when workers are scattered and some hires have never been present?*

	<p>DR. SOGA: Organization culture isn't something we can build and then let be; it needs to be sustained through practices. If those practices are left behind, the culture disintegrates—especially if the organization comes to seem boundaryless. There was no way we can say we have a culture already there, and therefore now let's go out and work remotely. For newcomers especially, we mostly have to nurture it and pass it along in person.</p> <p>WSJ: <i>So for most organizations, 100% remote forever is tough.</i></p> <p>DR. SOGA: Absolutely. This is simply not sustainable for the internal climate an organization may want to build. There are organizations that are known for being purely remote, but if you want to build a powerful culture you don't build it that way. A hundred percent remote just doesn't work for culture, and I wish to sound this alarm bell now.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/30 Supply-chain crisis: still advertise?
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/supply-chain-crisis-has-companies-asking-should-we-still-advertise-11635599386?mod=hp_list_pos4
GIST	<p>The global supply-chain crisis is spreading to Madison Avenue.</p> <p>Many companies have been struggling for months to get products to consumers, as they face shortages in everything from raw materials to labor to cargo containers, among other problems. Some are questioning whether it makes sense to promote products they can't adequately stock.</p> <p>"It's not wise to drive demand when shelves are bare," said Susan Cantor, chief executive officer of branding firm Sterling Brands.</p> <p>Chocolate giant Hershey Co. and household-goods manufacturers Kimberly-Clark Corp. and Church & Dwight Co. in recent days said they cut back on ad and marketing spending in the third quarter because of supply-chain issues.</p> <p>"The supply-chain challenges just wouldn't enable us to be able to meet further demand that we would create through our very impactful advertising," Hershey Co. Chief Executive Michele Buck said on an investor call. "It just didn't make sense."</p> <p>Kimberly-Clark Chief Financial Officer Maria Henry said her company, which makes Kleenex facial tissues and Huggies diapers, had more demand than it could meet at the moment. "We have challenges getting the product to our customers," she said on an investor call.</p> <p>Church & Dwight, the consumer-product company behind the Arm & Hammer and OxiClean brands, said Friday that it pulled back on third-quarter marketing for products most affected by the shortages, especially household products. The New Jersey-based company said it expects supply-availability issues to begin to abate in the first half of 2022 for most of its brands.</p> <p>Two of the largest players in online advertising, Facebook Inc. and Snap Inc., said recently that they expected a slowdown in revenue growth in the fourth quarter, due in part to macroeconomic factors such as supply-chain bottlenecks and labor shortages. Both companies said their advertising business's performance was also hurt by Apple Inc.'s new privacy rules, which make it harder for advertisers to target their ads at audiences.</p> <p>The retreat comes as the ad market has been booming, thanks in part to strong consumer confidence and the end to some restrictions intended to slow down the spread of Covid-19. The fourth quarter of the year is typically the most lucrative for media entities as brands and retailers rely heavily on the critical holiday shopping season.</p>

Jason Wagenheim, president and chief revenue officer at Bustle Digital Group, which owns publications Gawker, Nylon and W Magazine, said his company is seeing “temporary but significant advertising pauses” from many clients because of severe product shortages across many sectors including cars, diapers, toys, food and consumer electronics.

“I think large media organizations are going to see short term significant impacts in these categories until the supply-chain issues right themselves, which should be early in 2022,” Mr. Wagenheim said in an email.

Some digital publishers are planning for ad spending to shrink by at least 5% in the fourth quarter compared with their previous projections, according to media executives.

Not all platforms are expected to be affected equally by the ad pullback. Digital ad sellers often can be the first to see an advertising retreat because online ads are easier to cancel. Those ads are often bought in real-time or closer to their run date and are unlike TV ads, which are often sold well in advance of when they air.

Still, some TV networks are also seeing some softness in spending from several ad categories including auto manufacturers, according to ad buyers and TV network executives. Some fast-food chains also aren’t spending as much as expected because of the labor shortage, a TV executive said.

Fox Corp. CEO Lachlan Murdoch said his company had seen advertising pullbacks from car makers and telecommunications companies.

“It’s a supply issue, not a demand issue,” Mr. Murdoch said at a conference in September. “So we expect those clients and those partners to come back strongly once they have the supply of their cars to be able to sell.”

Fox and Wall Street Journal parent [News Corp](#) share common ownership.

The auto sector has been particularly [hampered by the global chip shortage](#). This has caused manufacturers to cut production, resulting in car shortages at dealerships in the U.S.

[General Motors](#) Co. and [Ford Motor](#) Co. this week [reported steep drops in third-quarter profit](#). They said supply-chain disruptions should slowly improve in the fourth quarter and throughout next year, although strong car demand will make it difficult to restock dealership lots. Neither company mentioned cutting back on advertising while discussing their results. In an email, GM’s chief marketing officer said the company planned to have “a hearty media presence” in the fourth quarter. Ford didn’t respond to a request for comment.

Advertisers tend to be reluctant to cut marketing expenditures too deeply. Many believe it is important to remain top of mind with customers and fear that deep cuts to advertising can allow rivals to be more visible, which can lead to the loss of market share.

Consumer-product giant Procter & Gamble, one of the largest advertisers in the world, said it would continue to invest in marketing despite the supply-chain crisis, which has led to escalating costs. “We continue to drive marketing spend,” said Andre Schulten, P&G’s chief financial officer, during a recent call with investors.

Ad-holding companies, which work on behalf of big advertisers, appear largely unaffected so far by the supply-chain bottlenecks.

“To date, we haven’t seen any impact from supply-chain disruption in our numbers,” said Mark Read, CEO of WPP PLC, the world’s largest ad-holding company by revenue, on a call with analysts on Thursday. Still, Mr. Read said his company had seen a “little bit of weakness” in automotive during the third quarter because of the semiconductor shortages.

	<p>WPP expects U.S. ad spending to surge 22% to \$276 billion this year, according to a prediction made in June by WPP's ad buying firm GroupM, and has no plans to downgrade its estimates.</p> <p>"The factors which have driven the U.S. advertising market up so much, so fast, aren't showing signs of abating, despite the issues with supply chains and Apple's operating system," said Brian Wieser, global president of business intelligence at GroupM.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/30 School-board elections heated battleground
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/mask-mandates-critical-race-theory-heat-up-school-board-elections-11635598800?mod=hp_lead_pos10
GIST	<p>CASTLE ROCK, Colo.—For the better part of four hours Tuesday night, residents of this Denver suburb stood at a lectern 20 feet from the seven members of the county school board, pointed their fingers and called them tyrants, sociopaths, liars and incompetents.</p> <p>One armed sheriff's deputy SAT in a chair a few feet from the podium. Two more hovered near the back of the room, and several other armed security officers stood in the hallway.</p> <p>The last school-board meeting before Election Day capped what has become one of the most vitriol-filled political contests in Douglas County in years, and is one of hundreds of school-board elections across the country that have turned into hard-fought political battles. Many of the elections set for Tuesday have become proxies for the larger culture war over masking mandates and the teaching of tenets of critical race theory.</p> <p>In Loudoun County, Va., a school-board member resigned following threats of violence to her and her family. Florida districts are considering shortening public-comment periods at meetings, and in Kentucky a school board has asked parents to communicate through emails after board meetings became rowdy. Little of the contention is tied to the local issues such as building maintenance and teacher pay that usually animate school-board elections.</p> <p>Across the 23 states that allow recalls for school-board members, 84 campaigns are targeting 215 board members, about four times greater than the 15-year average, according to Ballotpedia, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization based in Wisconsin.</p> <p>The number of candidates running per school-board seat increased by 17% from 2018 to 2021 across the 463 school districts monitored by Ballotpedia.</p> <p>Attorney General Merrick Garland ordered the Federal Bureau of Investigation to work with federal prosecutors and local officials to thwart what he called "a disturbing spike in harassment, intimidation, and threats of violence" against teachers and school staff over politically charged issues, according to a memo Mr. Garland sent this month. Republicans have criticized the directive as an effort to silence parents who speak out on topics such as mask mandates and how race is addressed in schools.</p> <p>In Colorado, 530 candidates are running for seats across 178 school districts, said Pam Benigno, Education Policy Center director for the Independence Institute in Denver, a libertarian-leaning think tank. In 2017, there were just over 200 candidates.</p> <p>"I have never seen anything like this before," Ms. Benigno said.</p> <p>Douglas County, a stretch of small cities and towns south of Denver, is among the fastest-growing in the nation. The affluent, mostly white population has traditionally voted Republican. Newcomers are shifting the political balance. Republicans still outnumber Democrats by about two to one, but unaffiliated voters now make up the largest segment of the county. The district has 65,000 students. The student body is 82%</p>

white, 9% Latino, 5% Asian, 1% Black, and 2% two or more races, according to National Center of Educational Statistics.

The race for four seats on the seven-member board has boiled down to two slates: One favors masking mandates and training about social equity; the other opposes masking mandates as well as social-equity lessons which incorporate the underlying principles of critical race theory.

Critical race theory, an academic concept [first developed by legal scholars in the early 1970s](#), argues the legacy of white supremacy remains embedded in modern-day society through laws and institutions that shaped American society.

In March, in response to public calls for greater awareness of racism and sexism in the district, the board passed an equity policy which calls for tolerance, inclusion and a focus on social justice in schools.

Kevin DiPasquale, president of the Douglas County Federation, which represents teachers and other staff, said the school board's focus on equity has helped to give teachers freedom to "teach fact-based history so they can prepare their students for the world ahead of them."

Many parents spoke out to object at board meetings to condemn what they said was an overemphasis on race.

Mike Peterson worked from home last year during the pandemic as his daughter took her high-school classes remotely from home. Listening in, he said he thought the classes were light on rigor and filled with too much information that he considered liberal political opinion.

He started looking online to see what he could find out about the district, which led him to a video of a recent teacher training session in which he said diversity consultants explained that the U.S. was built by and for white, Christian, able-bodied, heterosexual men and that system was inherently racist.

"It was the teacher's responsibility to bring it down brick by brick and law by law," he said of the training. "I looked at that stuff and said, 'Whoa, that's it, we have to put a stop to that.'"

The district said it cut ties with the diversity consultants after many residents voiced objections.

Mr. Peterson, a 52-year-old retired Naval aviator, decided to run for school board. He also helped organize a slate of three other candidates he hopes will win a majority of board seats in Tuesday's election. If the slate wins and takes control of the board, it has promised to get rid of mask mandates for students and pare back what Mr. Peterson believes to be political mission creep inside the schools.

Will Johnson, a Douglas County parent of three, who started a local chapter of the Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism (FAIR) supports Mr. Peterson. FAIR says it seeks to protect civil rights and contest the adoption of agendas that members believe focus too much on race and demands for social activism.

FAIR this year solicited complaints from teachers, students and parents of incidents from the local schools. They include: a seventh-grade teacher who played a podcast which suggested racism permeates the nation's police departments; another seventh-grade teacher who wore a T-shirt that said "Stop Pretending Your Racism is Patriotism"; and a note from the school, titled "Condemning Racism and Social Injustice," which included a call to "dismantle the colorblind framework."

Mr. Peterson's slate hopes to defeat, among others, board member Krista Holtzmann, the board's vice president who is running for re-election with the support of many teachers. Ms. Holtzmann, a formal child-abuse prosecutor, has watched meetings grow more intense and angry over the past year-and-a-half.

To de-escalate the tension, the board banned clapping. Instead, some parents stood at meetings and turned their backs. At one meeting, a man pantomimed punching another man with whom he disagreed. Police escort board members to their cars after meetings as a safety precaution.

“It just feels like the room reaches an intensity level where it does not feel safe,” Ms. Holtzmann said. “There is a loud vocal minority that have at times been inappropriate at best and threatening at worst.”

At Tuesday’s meeting, which began at 6 p.m., more than 70 people signed up to speak during the public-comment period. About a third congratulated the seven-member board for its patience and compassion. The rest were confrontational and angry.

“You have been weighed, you have been measured and you have been found wanting,” said Jason Kassay, a Douglas County parent.

“I hope it is the last time I have to see you,” Lauren Bostrom, another parent, told the board.

Just past 10 p.m., the board called a break, and a man wearing a shirt that read “A Masked Child is an Abused Child” stood near the back and loudly opined that forcing students to wear masks was unconstitutional. A woman, knitting in the front row most of the evening, raised her head.

“Shut up! Just shut up!” she screamed as she walked briskly toward the man demanding he leave the meeting.

A crowd quickly surrounded the woman and police cleared the room. A few minutes later, a few residents returned, and the board continued the meeting.

By 10:30 p.m. Ms. Holtzmann’s eyes were bloodshot.

She said she empathized with parents who care deeply about their children’s education but thought it was the board’s responsibility to keep students and staff safe and to provide in-person learning. She thinks mandating masks is the best way to accomplish that.

Promoting a diversity-and-inclusion agenda is important, she said, because pockets of bigotry and racism exist in the schools.

“I have heard candidates say they feel teachers are indoctrinating students and I find that offensive,” she said. “Teachers are professionals who choose a career not for the money but to help students. I don’t think they wake up in the morning set on indoctrinating anyone.”

She said she was frustrated by the level of animosity in the community. On some weeks she receives as many as 500 emails, many of them she considers toxic, she said.

Mr. Peterson watched the school-board meeting from the back of the room.

Mr. Peterson, a former assistant professor at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, and the slate of three other conservatives with whom he is unofficially running for school board, have raised more \$300,000, mostly from a few large local donations. The amount is among the most of any school-board candidates in the state and several times more than their challengers have raised, according to public records. The Douglas County Republican Party endorsed the slate as has 1776, a conservative group that supported former President Donald Trump.

Mr. Peterson said if he wins, his first step will be to go on a listening tour across the district schools, but he is adamant about redirecting the focus of education.

“There is an opportunity cost to teaching activism over academics,” he said. Citing test scores released by the state, he added, “Half the students in the district are not reading at grade level.”

HEADLINE	10/30 Uber, Lyft riders still face high prices
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/uber-and-lyft-thought-prices-would-normalize-by-now-heres-why-they-are-still-high-11635586381?mod=hp_lead_pos9
GIST	<p>Americans hailing an Uber or a Lyft ride still face elevated prices due to a shortage of drivers—the latest example of how a tight labor market is costing consumers more while also raising pay for workers.</p> <p>Uber Technologies Inc. and Lyft Inc. had expected most drivers to return to work after federal unemployment benefits expired nationwide in September. But that is happening only slowly. Fares have only marginally inched down from their summer highs.</p> <p>That means drivers are earning more and riders are paying more than they were at the beginning of this year, before the widespread availability of vaccines accelerated the economic reopening from pandemic shutdowns. Uber and Lyft prices are directly tied to driver supply, according to the companies.</p> <p>Data show that fares dipped during the late spring and summer in states that opted out early from some or all enhanced and extended federal unemployment benefits, compared with states that didn't, according to YipitData, which tracks emailed receipts.</p> <p>But the nationwide average ride-share fare declined just 3% during the first three weeks of October compared with a record high for the month of July. U.S. riders on average have still paid 22% more for a ride so far in October compared with January, and 30% more than they did in October 2019.</p> <p>Drivers are returning—just more slowly than demand for rides. An Uber spokesman said that “there are now more drivers on Uber in the U.S. than at any point during the pandemic,” but acknowledged that in many cities there are still labor constraints that have kept the nationwide average price high.</p> <p>“Now there’s so many people that want to go out and do things” that drivers haven’t kept pace with how quickly riders have returned, Lyft President John Zimmer said in September in a talk on Clubhouse, the audio-based social network. A Lyft spokeswoman said Saturday the company expects things will fully resolve, but couldn’t predict when.</p> <p>Both companies report third-quarter results next week and are expected to address the labor shortage and prices.</p> <p>The sting to consumer wallets raises questions about where the drivers have gone, and mirrors the trend rippling across the wider economy, in which a smaller labor force is contributing to wage and price inflation and causing Americans to wait longer for goods and services.</p> <p>The fact that prices remain close to where they were in the summer indicates that “there is still a supply shortage, even if the severity of the shortage is better than it was,” said Peter Martin, a YipitData research analyst with expertise in the ride-share industry. Longer trips and fewer rider discounts also contribute to higher average prices, he said.</p> <p>Harry Thomas, an Uber driver at night for 3½ years, switched to grocery delivery when Covid-19 lockdowns began in the spring of 2020. He returned briefly to ride-share driving this past summer, but now is back to delivery work, along with some freelance web and design projects. He also is applying for full-time jobs.</p> <p>“Uber has tried to entice me to come back and drive for them, but I rather like daytime hours,” said Mr. Thomas, who lives in San Antonio. He said he is concerned about safety and the possibility he could be sued under Texas law for helping someone access an abortion, even though Uber and Lyft have said they would cover legal costs for any driver in that situation.</p>

Unemployment benefits were extended to gig and self-employed workers for the first time during the pandemic, resulting in about 15 million claimants at the height of the federal program last year. Claimants likely included ride-share drivers, as well as people who had sole proprietorships or were paid as contractors. The number of people collecting those benefits declined gradually as the economy reopened and states began ending the programs this summer.

Benefits for gig workers and the self-employed expired in remaining states in early September, though some states have taken weeks to work through backlogs of claims.

Despite the end of those benefits, and the expiration of a weekly \$300 federal unemployment benefit added to regular state payments, many U.S. employers across the economy are struggling to fill positions. U.S. job openings have trended at record highs in recent months, exceeding the number of unemployed Americans seeking work, according to the Labor Department. That shows the labor market is perhaps tighter than the 4.8% unemployment rate indicates and that workers have more options.

A Goldman Sachs analysis found that driver earnings fell during the late spring and summer in states that ended enhanced unemployment benefits early compared with states that didn't, similar to the trend YipitData found with prices. Taken together, the data suggests the effects of the September expiration of benefits might eventually trickle down to the rest of the country—albeit slowly.

Economists say there are multiple reasons the labor force is constrained. Worries about becoming ill with Covid-19 and pandemic-related disruptions in school and child care are likely keeping some people on the sidelines. Others retired early or stepped away from the workforce temporarily, perhaps to wait for a better work opportunity or to become a full-time parent.

Meantime, openings in traditional jobs might have attracted some ride-share drivers.

“If you ever wanted a job in corporate America, it’s probably the easiest that it’s ever been,” said Brad Erickson, an analyst at RBC Capital Markets who covers Uber and Lyft.

Workers might also be migrating to other low-skill industries that have a lot of job openings. Many ride-share drivers turned to food and grocery delivery as demand for rides disappeared during the pandemic—and some are staying there. Nearly three-quarters of 4,000 DoorDash Inc. drivers surveyed in July said they didn’t want to share their vehicle, a staple of ride-hailing that won’t ever go away. Some drivers haven’t switched back to ride-share over concerns that demand might taper off again if the health crisis persists.

Jim McIntire, a 56-year-old Lyft driver in Chicago, said he chooses to drive because he likes the work and the money is good. He has been working three days a week and making more money than he did when he was working five or six days a week last year. “I have never, never made this much money” as a ride-share driver, he said, though he said he worries it might not last.

Uber and Lyft have [poured millions of dollars into attracting drivers](#) with bonuses. The companies are gradually pulling those incentives, particularly in areas where more drivers have returned.

Still, ending the labor shortage won’t bring prices back down to their pre-pandemic levels. Uber and Lyft are phasing out rider discounts to rein in costs and to show investors that they can grow without the dirt-cheap prices that were the hallmark of the past decade.

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HEADLINE	10/30 China's manufacturing activity contracts
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-manufacturing-activity-contracts-for-second-straight-month-11635645642?mod=hp_lead_pos5
GIST	BEIJING—A contraction in China's factory activity worsened for a second straight month in October, adding evidence that growth momentum has weakened as the country's vast manufacturing sector is

weighed down by soaring raw material costs, a widespread power crisis and a [sharp slowdown in the property sector](#).

China's official manufacturing purchasing managers index dropped to 49.2 in October, according to data released Sunday by the National Bureau of Statistics, lower than September's 49.6 reading and the lowest since the outbreak of the pandemic in February 2020.

The reading fell far short of the 49.9 median forecasts expected by economists polled by The Wall Street Journal and marked the second straight month that the gauge came in below 50 which separates contraction from expansion.

Last month's PMI contraction had already ended an 18-month-long factory-sector boom that helped power the world's second-largest economy as it bounced back from the pandemic.

Although some economists expected China's factory activity would improve slightly from the previous month as the power curbs eased, Sunday's reading instead suggested that the [broader picture for China's economy is quickly deteriorating](#).

Domestic demand, in particular, remains weak, held back by an [ailing property market under pressure](#) from Beijing's tightening rules, as well as widespread power shortages and sporadic virus outbreaks that have halted consumption and production activity.

In a statement Sunday, Zhao Qinghe, an economist with China's statistics bureau, blamed the drop in factory activity primarily on the power shortage and soaring raw material prices. The recent jump in commodities prices pushed the subindex for output to 61.1 in October from 56.4 in September, hitting the highest level since 2016, when the data was first published, Mr. Zhao said.

Since September, China has been dealing with power rationing and blackouts, partly the result of aggressive energy-efficiency targets set by Beijing and aimed at reaching peak carbon emissions before 2030.

China's main economic-planning agency, the National Development and Reform Commission, said in a statement last week that it met with coal producers to discuss measures to tamp down soaring coal prices.

Although authorities have been pulling out the stops in recent weeks [to ease the country's worst power crunch](#) in decades, some economists say the energy crisis could persist for months, slowing factory output and pushing up industrial inflation.

Beyond the power crisis, a downturn in the real-estate market has also added to the list of growth headwinds. China's property sector, which by some estimates contributes to as much as one-third of growth in the world's second-largest economy, has seen home sales and average home prices fall in recent weeks as regulators enforce strict rules on developers' leverage. A [property-tax pilot](#) announced by the country's top legislative body aimed at distributing wealth more evenly has only added to the uncertainties.

China's crackdown on its property sector has brought the specter of broader economic pain as weakened demand spills over into investment and construction, with potential negative implications for employment and local government finances.

Exports, a key engine of the country's economic rebound following the coronavirus outbreak, also showed softness in October, according to Sunday's data release. A subindex measuring new export orders rose to 46.6 in October, improving slightly from September's 46.2 but still remaining deep in contraction territory. The new orders subindex, however, dropped further from the previous month to 48.8 in October.

Meanwhile, China's official nonmanufacturing PMI, which includes the services and construction sectors, expanded in October, albeit at a slower rate than in September, according to separate data also released

	<p>Sunday by China's statistics bureau. The nonmanufacturing PMI came in at 52.4 in October, versus 53.2 in September, while the subindex tracking the services sector declined to 51.6 in October from 52.4 in the previous month.</p> <p>The continued expansion in the services sector, though precarious, came as Chinese citizens enjoyed a weeklong National Day holiday and social-distancing measures were relaxed, supporting a bounceback in services that rely on human contact.</p> <p>A virus flare-up in a dozen regions in late October, however, has led many to question how long the situation can last, particularly as authorities reimpose strict measures to crush new infections ahead of the Beijing-hosted Winter Olympics in February.</p> <p>A subindex measuring construction activity, meantime, weakened to 56.9 from 57.5 in September, the statistics bureau said.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/31 Supermarkets supply chain 'whack-a-mole'
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/supermarkets-play-supply-chain-whack-a-mole-to-keep-products-on-shelves-11635672603?mod=hp_lead_pos7
GIST	<p>Supermarket chains are revamping their operations to navigate persistent product shortages, expanding storage space and curbing discounts to make sure they don't run out.</p> <p>Companies are planning for shortages of popular brands of food and staples to continue for months and managers are trying to keep up as different products run short from week to week, industry executives said. While food supplies overall remain plentiful, Nutella spread, Prego pasta sauces and Pringles chips are among many items that have been tough to secure in recent weeks, some supermarket companies said. Lunchables snacks and Capri Sun drinks have been hit-or-miss for months.</p> <p>"The fact is, it's like whack-a-mole," Vivek Sankaran, chief executive of Albertsons Cos., said on a conference call recently. "On any given day, something is out of stock in the store."</p> <p>Ferrero U.S.A. Inc., the maker of Nutella, and Pringles producer Kellogg Co. said they have seen heightened demand for their products. Campbell Soup Co. said it is increasing production and looking to hire to meet demand for Prego sauces. Kraft Heinz Co. said that orders for Lunchables and Capri Sun are exceeding expectations and that it is accelerating investments to increase production.</p> <p>Some packaged-food makers, struggling with stretched staffing and hard-to-find raw materials, are limiting shipments of products, companies said. In response, grocery buyers, who are in charge of planning and coordinating orders, are spending more time tracking down vendors, managing trucks that arrive late and searching for substitutes for out-of-stock items. Food retailers are buying extra inventory whenever they can, ordering items months earlier than usual and sending their own trucks directly to manufacturing plants to make pickups and speed up delivery times.</p> <p>Some retailers are withdrawing discounts to reduce demand. Others are expanding or opening new warehouses. While some executives said stockpiling itself can exacerbate shortages, retailers said they are buying more goods to get ahead of delays and spotty availability. Supermarkets are receiving incomplete or late orders from suppliers and are carrying fewer flavors, sizes or brands.</p> <p>"You don't want to promote when you can't fill the products," said Neil Stern, chief executive of Good Food Holdings LLC, an operator of Bristol Farms, New Seasons Market and other West Coast retail chains. Consumers typically find it easier to substitute products or switch brands when there isn't a huge promotion going on, executives said.</p> <p>When Covid-19 began spreading in the U.S. in early 2020, grocery chains struggled with the surge in demand for staples ranging from baking products to toilet paper. As pandemic restrictions lifted this year</p>

and the U.S. economy rebounded, food makers haven't been able to find enough workers to fully staff production lines, or drive trucks to deliver goods to stores and warehouses.

[Kroger](#) Co. is securing added warehouse space to hold an expanded "safety stock" of more than 70 staples such as baking items and cleaning supplies, according to Gabriel Arreaga, the grocer's chief supply chain officer. To work around international shipping delays, Kroger is now receiving product deliveries through a broader range of ports, and taking on additional carriers to speed up shipments.

Kroger is using its data analytics business to identify substitutes when suppliers can't produce more, Mr. Arreaga said. Other retailers say consumers have been forgiving of shortages and are buying different products or brands.

Supermarkets are trying new tactics to speed up the distribution process. They are adding time slots for drop-offs and creating more aisles in warehouses to increase capacity.

Tops Markets LLC, based in New York state, is picking up food directly from manufacturers and taking full truckloads of one product rather than the typical mix of items, said Kristen Hanson, who oversees the grocer's merchandising. She said she and her team are ordering three months in advance for some products, compared with one week before the pandemic.

"What orders showed up? And who do we need to call? It's our battle every day," Ms. Hanson said.

Associated Wholesale Grocers Inc., a wholesaler serving more than 3,000 locations, started buying supplies of whatever it could find to get ahead of shortages, said Chief Executive David Smith. The company holds 30% more goods compared with a year ago and is expanding its warehouses, with plans to open another next year.

"I do think everybody has shifted their thinking" to build more inventory, Mr. Smith said.

Food sellers' strategies to buy bigger and earlier represents a shift from the ["just-in-time" model](#) of holding as little inventory as possible. Industry executives said they plan to continue storing more supply at least for the next several months, but don't yet know if the change will be permanent.

Those efforts are adding to supermarkets' costs. Keith Milligan, controller of Piggly Wiggly stores in Alabama and Georgia, said they are holding about \$45 million of inventory in total, a nearly 30% increase from typical years. The grocer might reach \$50 million in inventory before year-end if it can secure more packaged food such as canned goods.

Other executives said there is only so much they can do to work around shortages. In Massachusetts, Roche Bros. Inc. has been running low on [PepsiCo](#) Inc.'s Gatorade drinks for months. The grocer instead tried ordering [Coca-Cola](#) Co.'s Powerade and smaller sports beverages from local suppliers to little avail; they are having challenges keeping products in stock too. PepsiCo didn't respond to requests for comment. Coca-Cola said it is working to address supply-chain challenges.

Arthur Ackles, Roche's vice president of merchandising and buying, said: "The problem is people buy more of the other products."

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HEADLINE	10/31 Delta surge recedes, challenges ahead
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/delta-surge-of-covid-19-recedes-leaving-winter-challenge-ahead-11635672600?mod=hp_lead_pos1
GIST	The Delta wave of the Covid-19 pandemic is past its peak, with new cases, hospitalizations and deaths declining in most states. The approaching holidays and winter months will test whether the U.S. can sustain that momentum.

New Covid-19 case numbers in the U.S. are close to levels recorded near this time last year, with a seven-day average at about 72,000 a day, Johns Hopkins University data show. But the trajectory is opposite. Last fall, cases were rising while hospitalizations and deaths, trailing indicators, were starting to follow.

Now all those metrics are improving significantly at the national level. Case counts from the Delta surge [were declining by mid-September](#) after peaking above 160,000 a day, Johns Hopkins data show. The seven-day new case average was down about 16% this past Tuesday from the week prior, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Rochelle Walensky said, citing CDC data.

[Covid-19 hospitalizations](#), which surged to records in many states as the highly infectious Delta variant spread chiefly among the unvaccinated, are down about 54% from a late-August peak, Dr. Walensky said. The Delta-fueled wave continues to take a serious toll, but [the seven-day average in reported deaths has dropped](#) to roughly 1,400 a day from daily averages above 2,000 in late September, Johns Hopkins data show.

“We may be at a turning point,” Marcus Plescia, chief medical officer at the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, said of the pandemic. “We have a lot more tools now to fight it.”

Public-health experts say factors driving the decline likely include an incremental uptake in vaccines, the return of precautions like mask-wearing in certain areas and [growing immunity in the population](#) due to Delta’s rapid spread in hard-hit states including Mississippi and Florida.

“It’s a lot tougher for Delta to hop from person to person because so many people were infected,” said Jason Salemi, an associate professor of epidemiology at the University of South Florida. “It just came at a considerable cost.”

There are reasons for caution, health authorities say. The U.S. posted its worst numbers of the pandemic, including a quarter-million new cases a day, shortly after the winter holidays last year, when colder weather and family gatherings brought more people together indoors where the virus most easily spreads.

In the U.K., where the vaccination rate is higher than in the U.S., [cases remain high](#) after the country bet on immunity from vaccines and prior infections while dropping other measures like indoor crowd limits and mandatory mask-wearing.

Roughly one-third of the U.S. population has yet to get a single vaccine dose. In a few states, including Idaho and West Virginia, roughly [half the population hasn’t gotten a shot](#). In Idaho, the Delta-driven surge appears to be cooling, but hospitals are still in crisis mode and local health officials said they have also seen at least one [confirmed case of influenza](#).

“Whether we’re going to see another spike this fall and winter, I think we’re worried that we can,” Christine Hahn, state epidemiologist at the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, said at a press briefing this past week.

New England states [Vermont and Maine continue to battle](#) surges as Delta finds pockets of unprotected people there, officials say, despite some of the nation’s highest vaccination rates. In California, what had been a decline in Covid-19 hospitalizations has recently flattened well above a trough hit in June.

Health officials continue to encourage people to get vaccinated against both Covid-19 and the flu, and to take some additional precautions including masking indoors and staying home when they feel ill. More than three-quarters of counties nationwide have what the CDC considers high levels of Covid-19 transmission.

The U.S. could further bolster its defenses as [younger children begin to get vaccinated](#) in the weeks ahead. The Food and Drug Administration on Friday authorized the [Pfizer Inc.](#) and [BioNTech](#) SE [vaccine for some 28 million children](#) ages 5 through 11. Shots could be available to children this coming week after a review by the CDC.

	<p>Getting shots to eligible adults who haven't been vaccinated is still a challenge, however, and some health authorities are concerned the Delta wave's rapid retreat has eliminated some of the urgency that was spurring people to roll up their sleeves.</p> <p>In Louisiana, when Delta caused the seven-day new case average to jump to record highs near 6,000 a day in mid-August, state data also show vaccinations increased significantly. But with case averages back down near presurge levels seen in the early summer, vaccination rates have also tumbled. Louisiana is one of the nation's least-vaccinated states, with just under 48% of the whole population there fully vaccinated, federal data show.</p> <p>Louisiana and other states lagging on shots "will remain vulnerable to a similar surge in the future until we get vaccination rates up," said Joseph Kanter, the state's health officer and medical director.</p> <p>Missouri has also seen vaccination rates wane as its Delta surge faded, state epidemiologist George Turabelidze said. He expects cases to rise again this winter, but said that vaccines and immunity from previous infections should mute the effect.</p> <p>"Even if future waves happen, they very likely are not going to be of the magnitude that we saw last November and December," he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/31 Russians spurn Sputnik vaccine; head West
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/31/russians-spurn-sputnik-jab-and-head-west-for-vaccines
GIST	<p>When Denis Ovchinnikov read the news this summer that his Russian Sputnik V vaccine would not be recognised in Europe, he decided to take matters into his own hands and planned a trip to Belgrade.</p> <p>"I contacted a travel agency that sorted everything out. It was very easy. I made a little holiday out of it too, in between getting the two Pfizer shots," Ovchinnikov, who works at a PR agency in St Petersburg, said.</p> <p>When Russia became the first country to register and mass-produce a vaccine at the end of 2020, President Vladimir Putin hoped it would allow the country to open up more quickly than its western rivals. But Sputnik V has struggled to get international approval, effectively barring Russians from travelling to the west, where only those with EU, US or UK-approved vaccinations are able to visit.</p> <p>This has led to a boom in Russian vaccine tourists heading to nations such as Serbia, which allow visa-free travel from Russia. "I don't really understand all the politics behind this. I believe in all vaccines," said Ovchinnikov, who first got the Sputnik V vaccine last winter. "I just felt trapped, for almost two years now I haven't been able to travel and work in Europe any more after the borders shut, so this was my way out."</p> <p>EU and World Health Organization approval of the vaccine would ease international travel for Sputnik-vaccinated Russians, who are currently barred from travelling to most European capitals. The US is also set to ban entry to non-citizens who have not been jabbed with a vaccine approved by the WHO or US Food and Drug Administration.</p> <p>However, the EU has repeatedly delayed the approval of the Russian vaccine and has said Russia hasn't provided its regulator, the European Medicines Agency (EMA), with the right data about the vaccine. Russia has dismissed these claims as politically motivated and said the EMA was "dragging its feet" on purpose.</p> <p>Anna Filatovksaya, manager at the Russian Express travel agency, said that Sputnik V's troubles abroad presented a business opportunity for her firm. "When we started to offer our vaccine tours in early September, we quickly realised there was a real market for them. People were desperate for a vaccine that would allow them to travel again."</p>

In a recent survey in Russia, about 40% of respondents said the opportunity to freely travel was the main reason for getting a jab, a figure roughly equal to that for those who cited health concerns.

Filatovksaya said that Serbia was an “obvious” option at first, as Russians didn’t require visas to go there and the country offered the Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines to all citizens.

The Balkan nation has been one of the early vaccine success stories in Europe, securing jabs from a number of different suppliers, and has been offering its citizens the option of western vaccines, including Pfizer and AstraZeneca, Sputnik V and the Chinese Sinovac.

Roughly 160,000 foreigners, mainly from elsewhere in the Balkans, have so far received their Covid-19 vaccines in Serbia, according to official data.

However, Serbia isn’t the only destination for Russians. After some clients complained about the “inconvenient” three-week gap between the two-component Pfizer and AstraZeneca shots, Filatovksaya’s tourism agency decided to provide trips to neighbouring Croatia, which offered the one-component Johnson & Johnson vaccine to foreigners.

One of those flying to Croatia was Oleg Sentsov, an engineer from Moscow. “I actually got jabbed right after getting a third Sputnik V booster so I am pretty vaccinated right now! I don’t believe you can be over-immunised,” he said.

While for many such as Ovchinnikov and Sentsov a foreign jab presented a way out of isolation, a smaller group said they were getting a western shot because they distrusted Russian vaccines. “I thought if I was going to get one vaccine, it would not be Sputnik, I am sceptical towards Russian-made products,” said 54-year-old Marina Kalushiva, who travelled to Serbia in September.

Although domestically produced vaccines are widely available, only 32% of Russians are double vaccinated and surveys show that the majority are still not ready to get immunised, as they distrust the three approved homegrown vaccines.

Critics have blamed the failing vaccination campaign on the Kremlin’s mixed messaging about the pandemic as well as a low trust in the authorities and domestically manufactured products.

And while distrust appears to be high towards all vaccines, a poll conducted in June showed that 15% of Russians who are refusing a domestic one would take a western jab if it were made available to them, as growing calls to allow western vaccines to be given are starting to be heard.

“I wish Russia would just offer any vaccine available on the market. That would be the fair thing to do. Let the people decide,” Kalushiva said.

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HEADLINE	10/31 China rejects US intel report Covid origins
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/31/china-rejects-us-intelligence-report-on-covid-origins-as-political-and-false
GIST	<p>Beijing has lashed out against a US intelligence review into the origins of the Covid-19 pandemic, calling it “political and false” while urging Washington to stop attacking China.</p> <p>The Chinese foreign ministry’s retort came on Sunday, days after the US Office of the Director of National Intelligence released a fuller version of its findings from a 90-day review ordered by president Joe Biden.</p> <p>The paper said that, without new information, intelligence agencies would not be able to offer a better judgment on whether the virus emerged via animal-to-human transmission or a lab leak.</p>

It added that China's cooperation would probably be needed to reach a conclusive assessment on origins, although it emphasised that Beijing continued to "hinder the global investigation".

The [lab-leak theory](#) says the virus was spread from a research facility in Wuhan, the city where the contagion was first reported. The theory remains unsubstantiated, and China has repeatedly rejected it.

Foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said in a statement Sunday that China had expressed firm opposition to initial findings published in the [summary report in August](#).

"No matter how many times this report is published and how many versions are concocted, it cannot change the nature of this being entirely political and false," Wang said.

He added that the fact intelligence agencies were tapped in origin-tracing efforts was "ironclad proof" of politicisation, and urged the US to "stop attacking and smearing China".

Beijing has come under pressure to [consider a fresh inquiry](#) into the origins of the pandemic after a delayed and heavily politicised visit by a World Health Organization team of international experts that failed to conclude how the virus first broke out.

But Chinese officials have resisted this, often maintaining that calls for further information were motivated by politics.

In August, Biden said China was withholding critical information on the origins of Covid-19, adding that Chinese officials had worked to prevent access for international investigators.

Although Biden's review was launched while the lab-leak theory gained momentum, the report noted that most agencies believed the virus was not genetically engineered.

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HEADLINE	10/30 Tigray forces claim control key city Ethiopia
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/ethiopias-rival-tigray-forces-claim-strategic-city-80875861
GIST	<p>NAIROBI, Kenya -- Tigray forces said Saturday they have taken control of a key city on the route to Ethiopia's capital, while Ethiopia's government denied it and the United States urged the Tigray fighters to halt their advances as the yearlong war intensifies.</p> <p>Tigray forces spokesman Getachew Reda told The Associated Press the fighters took the strategic city of Dessie on Saturday afternoon. He also asserted they already had "commanding positions" on the outskirts of the nearby city of Kombolcha and had its airport in their sights.</p> <p>Ethiopian government spokesman Legesse Tulu rejected that as "fabricated propaganda" and told the AP that Dessie and its surroundings were under military control. Phone calls to residents of Dessie didn't go through, complicating efforts to verify both sides' claims.</p> <p>Taking control of the crossroads city of Dessie and Kombolcha would put the Tigray forces in position to move south along a major highway toward the capital, Addis Ababa. Getachew said "it's a matter of days" before the fighters will be able to physically link up with another armed group, the Oromo Liberation Army, with which it struck an alliance earlier this year.</p> <p>The Tigray forces say they are pressuring Ethiopia's government to lift a months-long blockade on their region of around 6 million people. Thousands of people have been killed since the war began in November 2020 after a political falling-out between the Tigray forces, who long dominated the national government, and the current government of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed.</p>

	<p>The Tigray fighters have taken the war into Ethiopia's neighboring Amhara and Afar regions, moving south through Amhara toward the capital, since recapturing much of their region in June.</p> <p>"We don't want to be in charge. We don't want Abiy to take an entire nation down with him, either," Getachew said. The prime minister has urged all capable citizens to war.</p> <p>The U.S. statement on Saturday called on the Tigray forces to halt their advances in and around Dessie and Kombolcha, withdraw from Amhara and Afar and not to use artillery against cities.</p> <p>The U.S. urged both sides to begin cease-fire negotiations, saying "there is no military solution to this conflict" which it said has cost "countless lives." It also said it continued to be "alarmed by reports of the deliberate denial of humanitarian assistance" in Tigray, where the United Nations has reported a "de facto humanitarian blockade."</p>
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HEADLINE	103/0 Colorado battles fall Covid resurgence
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/colorado-battles-fall-covid-19-resurgence-highest-hospitalization/story?id=80834105
GIST	<p>While some areas of the country are cautiously celebrating falling COVID-19 cases, hoping the declines might signal the return to a long-awaited sense of normalcy, some states continue to struggle as Americans prepare for winter.</p> <p>Health officials in Colorado are growing increasingly concerned as the rate of COVID-19 infections grows to levels not seen in more than 10 months.</p> <p>There is "a clear increase in cases statewide," state epidemiologist Dr. Rachel Herlihy said in a COVID-19 briefing on Thursday.</p> <p>In the last month alone, the state's daily case average has nearly doubled -- increasing by 91.5% since late September, according to federal data, and state data shows that Colorado's average positivity rate has risen from just under 7% last week, to nearly 8.5% this week.</p> <p>"Colorado moving in the wrong direction is a clear signal that we are not yet out of this pandemic, especially in under-vaccinated states. Colorado has yet to reach 70% with a first dose and if you layer in colder temperatures and relaxed masking, history is likely to repeat itself," said John Brownstein, an epidemiologist at Boston Children's Hospital and an ABC News contributor.</p> <p>While southern states in particular are seeing significant declines in their rates of infection, several states with colder weather, like Colorado, are beginning to experience an uptick in cases, as people begin to increasingly head indoors.</p> <p>"Coronaviruses tend to thrive in winter months and colder weather," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Rochelle Walensky said in a White House COVID-19 briefing last week. "Right now is not the time, as cases are coming down, to become complacent because we do know colder weather is ahead of us."</p> <p>Five states -- Alaska, Colorado, Maine, New Hampshire and New Mexico -- have all seen a percent increase in hospital admissions of about 15% or more in the last two weeks.</p> <p>"We are continuing to move very much in the wrong direction," Scott Bookman, Colorado's COVID-19 chief, said at a briefing on Wednesday.</p> <p>According to state officials, the highest coronavirus case rate is among the 5- to 17-year-old age group.</p>

Coronavirus-related hospitalizations have also been increasing in the state, a trend that is particularly worrying health officials.

Approximately 90% of the state's surgical and intensive care unit beds are currently in use, according to state officials. There are currently nearly 1,300 patients hospitalized with COVID-19 -- the highest number of patients receiving care since December, and on average, federal data shows that nearly 200 residents are being admitted to the hospital with COVID-19 each day.

"With the increase in percent of positivity and the concern of increase in cases in the coming weeks, we are all very concerned at this point about what we are seeing in our hospitals," said Bookman.

And as more patients stream into emergency rooms in need of care, the average number of available beds is rapidly declining.

Thirty percent of hospitals anticipate an ICU bed shortage in the next week. State health officials have told ABC News that hospitals in El Paso County have had days when they've had to turn away transfer requests.

The majority of those COVID-19 positive patients -- 77% -- are unvaccinated individuals.

To date, 61% of the total population in Colorado has been fully vaccinated, leaving a significant number of residents still unvaccinated. People who have not been fully vaccinated are 6.1 times more likely to test positive with the virus and 11.3 times more likely to die from it, compared with people who are vaccinated, according to the CDC.

The notable divide between vaccinated and unvaccinated is evident in counties across the state.

In Crowley County, home to just over 6,000 residents, less than 49% of the eligible population has been vaccinated with at least one shot, according to state data. High transmission across the county remains rampant. In El Paso County, which currently has one of the state's highest number of hospital admissions rate, approximately 65% of the county's population over 12 have been fully vaccinated.

In total, 15 Colorado counties are significantly lagging, partially vaccinating 50% or less of their eligible population.

Comparatively, 11 counties have vaccinated at least 80% of their total population with at least one shot. San Miguel County, with a population of over 8,100, has 74% of its population fully vaccinated, and its infection rate has remained steadily low, despite increasing figures across the rest of the state.

If the situation in Colorado does not improve in the coming days, Colorado Gov. Jared Polis said Thursday he is prepared to take certain steps to address the uptick, including bringing in federal medical surge teams to help local hospitals in need of extra support, halting elective surgeries, expanding the use of monoclonal antibody treatment and possibly reactivating crisis standards of care, which determine how to most efficiently use medical resources, such as ventilators or ICU beds.

"A new surge once again places a challenging burden on our already tired health care professionals while also deferring important hospital procedures. This should really send a message to those still on the fence to do their part," said Brownstein. "Remaining unvaccinated populations still represent opportunities for this virus to spread. This surge in Colorado should serve as an important warning to other states as we head into the winter months."

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HEADLINE	10/30 More NYC workers vaccinated
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/oct/30/more-nyc-workers-get-jabs-amid-mandate-but-26k-sti/

GIST	<p>NEW YORK (AP) - More than 26,000 of New York City's municipal workers remained unvaccinated after Friday's deadline to show proof they've gotten at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, the city said Saturday.</p> <p>A last-minute rush of jabs boosted the vaccination rate to 83% among police officers, firefighters, garbage collectors and other city workers covered by the mandate as of 8 p.m. Friday, up from 76% a day earlier.</p> <p>Workers who haven't complied with the requirement will be put on unpaid leave starting Monday, leaving the Big Apple bracing for the possibility of closed firehouses, fewer police and ambulances and mounting trash.</p> <p>Vaccination rates for the city's fire and sanitation departments jumped significantly Friday as workers rushed to meet the deadline for the mandate and an extra incentive: Workers who get a shot by Friday will get \$500.</p> <p>The fire department's rate rose 8% and the sanitation department saw an additional 10% of its staff get vaccinated Friday, according to city data. The fire and sanitation departments each have 23% of their staffs that still haven't been vaccinated.</p> <p>The NYPD had a 5% jump in vaccinations Friday, leaving 16% of police personnel who had yet to get a dose.</p> <p>City officials have been weighing various contingencies to deal with an expected staffing shortfall come Monday.</p> <p>The fire department said it was prepared to close up to 20% of its fire companies and have 20% fewer ambulances in service while also changing schedules, canceling vacations and turning to outside EMS providers to make up for expected staffing shortages.</p> <p>Mayor Bill de Blasio said the sanitation department will move to 12-hour shifts, as opposed to the usual 8-hour shifts, and begin working Sundays to ensure trash doesn't pile up.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/30 Chicago city council keeps vax mandate
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/oct/30/chicago-city-worker-vaccine-mandate-survives-repeal/
GIST	<p>CHICAGO (AP) — Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot's COVID-19 vaccine mandate for city workers survived another challenge — this one from the City Council, which voted down a proposal pushed by some of its members to repeal it.</p> <p>The council voted 30-13 Friday to keep in place the mandate after Lightfoot said that halting it would put the public at greater risk of contracting the coronavirus. The council further decided against stripping the mayor of her power to order such measures.</p> <p>"I know, without a doubt ... the only way we can save lives and put this pandemic behind us is to get people vaccinated," Lightfoot said.</p> <p>Under Lightfoot's mandate, all city employees must report their vaccination status or risk being put on no-pay status. Those who are not vaccinated must undergo regular testing until Jan. 1, when they must be fully inoculated.</p> <p>The mandate triggered a battle between Lightfoot and the police officers' union, which has urged members to defy it, maintaining that the mayor had no right to order city employees to disclose such information.</p> <p>The vote came after some City Council members expressed concern that many officers would refuse to comply with the mandate and would leave the department understaffed and unable to adequately protect</p>

	<p>the nation's third-largest city. But the police superintendent reported Monday that about two dozen employees had been placed on no-pay status.</p> <p>Lightfoot asked the aldermen to "stop the fearmongering" about possible manpower shortages that she said have not materialized.</p> <p>The council's vote came the same day a federal judge declined a motion by 130 firefighters and other city workers to temporarily halt enforcement of the mandate.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/30 Russia troop movements Ukraine border
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/russian-troop-movements-near-ukraine-border-prompt-concern-in-us-europe/2021/10/30/c122e57c-3983-11ec-9662-399cfa75efee_story.html
GIST	<p>A renewed buildup of Russian troops near the Ukrainian border has raised concern among some officials in the United States and Europe who are tracking what they consider irregular movements of equipment and personnel on Russia's western flank.</p> <p>The officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss the matter publicly, said the troop movements have reignited concerns that arose in April, when the largest buildup of troops by Russia near the Ukrainian border in years sparked an international outcry.</p> <p>The renewed movements of Russian forces in the area come as the Kremlin embraces a harder line on Ukraine. Russian officials from President Vladimir Putin on down have escalated their rhetoric in recent months, attacking Kyiv's Western ties and even questioning its sovereignty. Putin has warned that any expansion of NATO military infrastructure on Ukrainian territory represents a "red line" for Moscow.</p> <p>The situation also comes as the simmering 7½-year conflict between Ukrainian forces and Russian-backed separatists in the eastern Donbas region enters a new stage. On Oct. 26, Ukraine's military confirmed it had used a Turkish-made drone against a position in Donbas, the first time Kyiv has employed the technology in combat, prompting an outcry from Moscow.</p> <p>Relations between Moscow and NATO are especially tense. Russia suspended its mission to NATO in Brussels on Oct. 18 after the alliance expelled eight members of the Russian mission on accusations of espionage.</p> <p>What the Russian forces gathering near the Ukrainian border are doing is unclear.</p> <p>Videos have surfaced on social media in recent days showing Russian military trains and convoys moving large quantities of military hardware, including tanks and missiles, in southern and western Russia.</p> <p>"The point is: It is not a drill. It doesn't appear to be a training exercise. Something is happening. What is it?" said Michael Kofman, director of the Russia studies program at the Virginia-based nonprofit analysis group CNA.</p> <p>Officials in the United States and Europe began noticing the movements particularly in recent weeks, after Russia concluded a massive joint military exercise with Belarus known as Zapad 2021 on its western flank in mid-September.</p> <p>According to Kofman, satellite imagery shows that forces from Russia's 41st Combined Arms Army, normally based in the Siberian city of Novosibirsk, didn't return to Siberia after the exercises, and instead linked up with other Russian forces near the Ukrainian border. Kofman also said imagery appears to show that Russia's 1st Guards Tank Army, an elite unit based outside Moscow, is moving personnel and materiel toward Ukraine.</p>

Oleksiy Danilov, secretary of Ukraine's national security and defense council, said in a statement that after the conclusion of the Zapad 2021 exercises, Russia left military equipment, as well as control and communications centers, at training sites along the Ukrainian border.

Danilov estimated that the number of Russian troops deployed around the Ukrainian border at 80,000 to 90,000, not including the tens of thousands stationed in Crimea.

Moscow has prompted alarm by amassing large contingents of troops near the Ukrainian border in the past, only to subsequently withdraw those forces and quell fears of a renewed invasion of Ukraine.

Ukrainian officials see such moves as a way for Moscow to keep the situation tense and uncertain. Since 2015, when the front lines of the conflict more or less froze in place, the buildups haven't led to a mass territory-gaining offensive by Russia or the separatist forces it backs.

Kofman said this time the situation may merit particular attention, however, because Russia appears to have lowered its threshold for what would prompt the Kremlin to act in Ukraine.

"I think you have to step back and look at this past year holistically, and if you do, you will know that the Russian tone and messaging on Ukraine has changed dramatically," he said.

In statements over the course of the year, Putin and other top Russian officials have said the expansion of NATO activities in Ukraine represents a "red line" for Moscow, whereas previously they cited NATO membership for Ukraine as a move they couldn't abide, Kofman said.

"It appears that Russia is shifting the goal post of what is acceptable," he said.

Putin outlined that view in an article in July, claiming Ukraine was being functionally controlled by Western nations to foment anti-Russian sentiment.

"We will never allow our historical territories and people close to us living there to be used against Russia," Putin wrote. "And to those who will undertake such an attempt, I would like to say that this way they will destroy their own country."

In comments to the Valdai Discussion Club this month, Putin said formal NATO membership for Ukraine may never happen, "but military expansion on the territory is already underway, and this really poses a threat to the Russian Federation."

Dmitry Medvedev, former Russian president and now the deputy head of Russia's security council, called Ukraine a "vassal state" that is "under direct foreign control" in an Oct. 11 article in the Kommersant newspaper.

Previously, Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko, an ally of Putin, accused the United States of building NATO military bases in Ukraine using training centers as a cover.

U.S. troops have been training Ukrainian forces in western Ukraine for years, an initiative undertaken by Washington and its NATO allies after Russia annexed Crimea in 2014. Ukrainian forces also have participated in joint exercises with the United States and its NATO allies. The United States has provided Ukraine with Javelin antitank weaponry but has not taken any active role in fighting.

Kofman said Russia this year suddenly invested a large amount of money in developing a ready reserve for its military and also ordered forces to practice anti-drone and anti-Javelin maneuvers relevant to the conflict in Ukraine, attracting the attention of military analysts.

Putin has condemned comments by U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, who during a visit to Ukraine this month described Russia as an obstacle to peace and said NATO membership remained open to Kyiv. Austin, referring to Russia, said no nation had a right to veto membership.

Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Maria Zakharova on Thursday accused Ukraine of having plans to retake control of the Donbas region by force. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov a day earlier said sales of Turkish drones to Ukraine potentially “destabilized” the situation.

German and French Foreign Ministry officials expressed concern about Ukraine’s use of Turkish-made drones, calling for de-escalation. But Ukrainian officials said the country was exercising its right to self-defense after a Russian howitzer attack killed a Ukrainian serviceman and wounded another.

“When the Ukrainian army feels the need to defend its land, it does so. And it will further act under this principle,” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said in comments to journalists Friday.

“We are not mounting an offensive, we are just responding,” Zelensky added.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said Russia is “actively spreading fakes about Ukraine allegedly preparing an offensive or other nonsense. For the record, Ukraine does not prepare any offensive in the Donbas.”

Kuleba noted that Moscow has left in place hardware and personnel that were sent near the Ukrainian border during the spring buildup and the September exercises.

The Russians “pulled back only a tiny part of the armada,” Kuleba said.

The U.S. Embassy in Kyiv warned Friday that Russia had repeatedly deployed howitzer artillery and drones against Ukrainian forces “in direct violation” of a July 2020 cease-fire agreement.

“Official Russian rhetoric suggesting Ukraine is aggravating the situation is not only misleading, it serves to escalate tensions,” the U.S. statement said.

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HEADLINE	10/30 Working parents unstable childcare system
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/30/business/paid-family-leave-working-parents.html
GIST	<p>Jennifer Simpkins had always been the primary caregiver for her young son and daughter. When they needed to be picked up from school, it was Ms. Simpkins, a preschool teacher, who would usually rush from work to get them. It typically fell to her to make them dinner, take them to gymnastics and karate and schedule their doctor’s appointments.</p> <p>During the height of the pandemic, however, things changed. Ms. Simpkins, 35, was able to find a new job in social services that allowed her to work from home, relieving some of the pressure from her workday. Because her partner, a restaurant chef who worked nights and weekends, was temporarily out of a job, the couple decided he would take on more of the child care duties.</p> <p>“It was nice in the beginning of the pandemic, having that time with my family,” said Ms. Simpkins, who lives in Downingtown, Pa. “I was there in case there was an emergency. I wasn’t commuting.”</p> <p>And when Ms. Simpkins started going into work again last fall, her family’s once-precarious child care arrangement seemed more manageable. Though her company wanted people in the office, it permitted employees to work remotely in certain circumstances.</p> <p>But she ended up feeling guilty when she worked from home to be with her children. Her partner eventually went back to work, which meant more limited flexibility. Once again, she was the person torn between her job and shouldering the demands of child care during the work day.</p>

“It has been right back to the juggling act that I felt before the pandemic,” she said. “The things that I thought were going to change in terms of maybe some more work flexibility to work from home some days or having that extra support financially or whatever it may be — we’re back to the grind.”

The pandemic disproportionately affected women, driving them from the labor force and saddling them with household and child care responsibilities. But there was also optimism among many policy experts and activists that the crisis would lead to a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to revolutionize the rules for working parents who were also primary caregivers, typically mothers.

School and day care closings had pushed the realities of child care front and center. For lower-wage shift workers, who already dealt with unpredictability, it became impossible to piece together work schedules. For people able to work remotely — with toddlers Zoom-bombing meetings and living rooms unexpectedly turning into classrooms — every day seemed to serve as a reminder for many working parents of how unstable their child care systems were.

In Washington, there was more widespread interest in establishing a robust infrastructure to support women and families, including proposals for subsidized child care, federally mandated paid family leave and universal prekindergarten. Many companies were placing an emphasis on flexible hours and remote work that seemed aimed in part at accommodating caregiving.

Above all, issues around managing child care and work that had long been considered private family matters were suddenly out in the open, turning the needs of working parents into a subject that resonated in conference rooms and state capitals across the country.

The potential implications were profound: Not only could the pandemic help recalibrate the answer to a question like, “Who picks up a sick child from school?” but it could also radically alter whether workplaces look askance at the parent who takes time away from work to do so. More fundamentally, any number of policy ideas that the pandemic inspired, if realized, could make it easier for working parents, especially women, to balance work and child care, as well as increase gender equality at work and at home and upend entrenched gender norms about caregiving.

“It just feels like an Overton window, where you have increased public dialogue but also you have public will to really change and reflect on women’s experiences in the work force,” C. Nicole Mason, the president and chief executive of the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, said in an interview this summer.

Roughly half of mothers with children under 18 [were employed full-time last year](#). For white-collar women and women with office jobs, who were more likely to benefit from increased work flexibility, the possible reforms were uniquely promising.

But the optimism is fading, partially because of Washington. The Biden administration and Democrats in Congress indicated early in the year that federal paid family and medical leave was a priority in the president’s domestic spending package — but the plan was pared down from 12 weeks to four weeks, then dropped entirely from the framework President Biden announced on Thursday.

“As you can see, the window is closing,” Dr. Mason said this past week.

Now, as the pandemic recedes and everyday life begins to return to normal, some working mothers are worried that nothing much will change.

“People are finally seeing how important child care is in our society,” said Kristen Shockley, an associate professor of psychology at the University of Georgia who studies the intersection of work and family life. “But is that going to translate into a way that our society values caregiving? I’m less optimistic about that.”

Some data and research underscore this concern, particularly on the key metric of work-versus-child care responsibilities.

Last year, when the pandemic first turned work and home life upside down, women in heterosexual dual-earner couples with young children bore the brunt of the child care burden, according to [one research paper](#) that was co-written by Ms. Shockley.

“Even though the separation of the spheres of work and home had largely disintegrated, and men were much more likely to be physically present in their homes, we found evidence a substantial portion of couples were engaging in highly gendered strategies,” the paper found.

Fathers are spending more time on child care than they did decades ago, according to the Pew Research Center. But the expectation that women, employed or not, are the primary caregivers appears to have stubbornly held. That is in part because this is how many people want to arrange their lives, though it can also be hard to disentangle those desires from societally reinforced expectations.

“They are quite immutable,” Ms. Shockley said, about traditional gender roles in caregiving. “Part of the issue is because it’s entrenched in so many different things. There are so many different pieces that would have to move for things to really change.”

In married-couple households with children ages 6 to 12, nonworking husbands on average did significantly more child care last year than usual, and yet still spent less time than nonworking wives do on child care every year, according to an analysis of Labor Department data.

It is less clear what the pandemic’s effect on primary caregiving duties has been this year, or on what decisions around work single parents had to make, but experts on gender dynamics in work and family said that patterns established in the first year of the pandemic were unlikely to have changed.

“Covid was an exogenous shock,” said Beth Livingston, an assistant professor of management and entrepreneurship at the University of Iowa’s Tippie College of Business, who studies gender and the management of work and family. “But the way we reacted to it particularly in those early stages — those initial reactions become our baselines.”

Other recent data also suggests that working mothers, nearly two years into the pandemic, are still largely responsible for taking care of their children.

More than 300,000 women ages 20 and over left the labor force in September, for instance, the biggest decrease since September 2020, according to the Labor Department, as children went back to school and child care arrangements may have shifted. (About 180,000 men age 20 and over joined the labor force in that time period.)

In some instances, the pandemic has brought into even starker relief women’s dual roles as breadwinners and caretakers.

When her 10-year-old daughter went back to school in person this year, Shonda Renee Lawary, a personal trainer in Marietta, Ga., began organizing her days around school drop-off and pickup times.

“I drive her to school every morning and I pick her up every afternoon. There are no after-school activities or after-school care,” said Ms. Lawary, 47, who is divorced. “Which also means that I have to structure my work schedule around very short windows of time.”

During her evening boot camps on Tuesdays and Thursdays, she often brings her daughter with her. She has noticed that other mothers taking her class frequently bring their children, too.

She does not expect much to change.

“Obviously, as she gets older and she gets a little more self-sufficient, it may allow me to work more, but I don’t know that that’s the best thing either,” she said. “It’s just such a careful balance to make sure she has the support she needs and I’m able to earn a living.”

With limited options for her daughter outside of school hours, she added, “I’m kind of operating under the assumption that this is my new norm and I’m going to have to figure it out.”

Even if the pandemic has not made the careful balance of working parenthood fundamentally easier, experts do see small, beneficial changes on the horizon.

“So much of being rewarded at work is being seen as a devoted professional, an ideal worker, and part of being seen as an ideal worker is being around a lot,” said Mary Blair-Loy, a sociologist at the University of California, San Diego, who studies gender, work and family. “If that expectation recedes and Zoom or other technologies are seen as a legitimate way to work in groups and to demonstrate commitment, I think that that kind of unfair penalty for mothers doing remote work will recede.”

Heather Silva, 43, has felt the effects of that kind of freedom first hand. Ms. Silva, who lives in Santa Barbara, Calif., and works in fund-raising at a public university, still considers herself primarily responsible for scheduling play dates and other activities for her 8- and 11-year-old daughters. But her husband, who works in telehealth, is now more comfortable taking time away from work to be with their children because his work culture has shifted during the pandemic and he is able to keep a more flexible schedule, she said.

She, too, is less worried when she has to leave work early for parenting duties at home.

“Before, I would be doing this work but sort of stealing off in the afternoons, sort of slinking away from the office and hoping no one notices that I’m leaving,” she said. “Now I feel like there’s a certain absolution about it.”

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HEADLINE	10/29 FDA approves Pfizer vaccine 5-11yr olds
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2021/10/29/fda-approves-vaccine-for-kids/
GIST	<p>Regulators on Friday authorized the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine for children 5 to 11 years old, a watershed moment celebrated by parents yearning for a return to normal life but viewed with ambivalence and outright skepticism by others worried about the potential risk of unknown side effects.</p> <p>The Food and Drug Administration’s emergency action cleared the first pediatric coronavirus vaccine in the United States — a two-shot regimen administered three weeks apart. The dose, 10 micrograms, is one-third of that used for adolescents and adults. In a clinical trial of 5- to 11-year-olds, the vaccine was almost 91 percent effective at preventing covid-19, the disease caused by the virus. The vaccine’s safety was studied in about 3,100 children who received the shot and had no serious side effects, the agency said.</p> <p>“Vaccinating younger children against COVID-19 will bring us closer to returning to a sense of normalcy,” FDA acting commissioner Janet Woodcock said in a statement. “Our comprehensive and rigorous evaluation of the data pertaining to the vaccine’s safety and effectiveness should help assure parents and guardians that this vaccine meets our high standards.”</p> <p>The issue of safety was a main focus of regulators and their advisers partly because the vaccine has been linked to rare cases of cardiac side effects in another group — male adolescents and young men. The symptoms of the side effects — myocarditis and pericarditis, which are inflammation of the heart muscle and lining, respectively — tended to be mild and treatable, doctors say.</p> <p>The FDA authorization is the latest step by the Biden administration to extend the reach of vaccines in hopes of taming a dangerous and vexing virus. The inoculation of adults, which began last December,</p>

recently entered a new phase, with [booster shots for all three vaccines](#) used in the United States available for many. About 28 million children are in the newly eligible group of 5- to 11-year-olds.

But the process of getting vaccines cleared for younger school-age children has been fraught, with members of the FDA's outside advisory committee [expressing some angst and disagreements](#) during a vociferous public debate this week. In the end, the panel voted 17 to 0, with one abstention, to recommend the vaccine, [agreeing with the FDA](#) that the shot's known and potential benefits outweighed the known and potential risks — the criteria for an emergency authorization.

The discussion about the shot is [expected to resume](#) Tuesday when the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, which advises the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is scheduled to meet to recommend how to use the vaccine. After CDC Director Rochelle Walensky signs off, probably on the same day, [providers, including pediatricians and pharmacists, will be able to begin administering](#) the vaccine.

The debate over the shot points up the complexities of making decisions involving vaccines, which are nearly always intended for healthy people. Covid poses special challenges because “while children are at lower risk of bad outcomes, they are not at no risk,” said Holly Fernandez Lynch, a bioethicist at the University of Pennsylvania.

About 1.9 million children 5 to 11 years old have been infected, and at least 146 have died, according to federal health officials. Those infected are vulnerable to “long-haul covid,” with lingering symptoms including fatigue, brain fog and respiratory problems, and a serious but rare condition called MIS-C, or multisystem inflammatory syndrome, which [can cause inflammation of the heart](#), lungs, kidneys, brain and other organs.

In addition, Lynch said, there are other types of side effects that go beyond the strictly physical: “When children have exposures, they have to stay home from school and parents have to miss work.”

Parents' uncertainty about the vaccine was captured in a [new survey](#) by the Kaiser Family Foundation that found only 27 percent of parents are planning to get their children vaccinated right away. A slightly larger group said they don't intend to have their children vaccinated. About one-third said they will “wait and see.”

Trishan Arul, chief executive of a digital health company who lives in Cincinnati, said he plans to have his 7-year-old daughter vaccinated as soon as possible. But he is having second thoughts about his 10-year-old son.

“We may want to wait a little bit” until there is more information about the myocarditis risk for younger boys, he said.

The complication did not show up in the trial, which was too small to detect such rare side effects. Arul said he might wait for a pediatric version of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, which has not been linked to the cardiac ailment.

Pediatrician Elizabeth Meade at Swedish Medical Center in Seattle said she is convinced the vaccine is “highly safe and highly effective,” and is eager to have her 7-year-old daughter vaccinated so the family can resume normal activities. But she acknowledged the decision is difficult for many parents.

“It's one thing to make a medical decision for ourselves and a different thing to make it for our kids,” she said.

Jennifer Su, a pediatric cardiologist at Children's Hospital Los Angeles, said she tells worried parents that the chance of developing myocarditis or other side effects from the vaccine is much lower than harm from covid and that she strongly recommends the shot.

The safety issue was on full display this week when the FDA's outside advisers reviewed the pediatric vaccine. Many members wanted all younger children to get the shot while others suggested it should be reserved for children at high risk of severe covid, and urged the CDC to narrow its use.

James E.K. Hildreth Sr., chief executive of Meharry Medical College, said he wanted to make sure that those who really need it, including children of color, could get the vaccine. "But to be honest, the best way to protect the health of some kids would be to do nothing at all because they're going to be just fine," he said.

Another member of the committee, [Eric J. Rubin](#), editor in chief of the New England Journal of Medicine and an adjunct professor of immunology and infectious diseases at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, said in an interview this week he believes the vaccine will benefit children — but not as much as it has helped adults.

"So in that situation, we worry more about side effects" because the benefits are not as large, he said. "They are kids. The stakes are high."

Ultimately, however, the panel endorsed the shot without a single "no" vote.

Federal officials and some experts said it was highly unlikely the CDC would recommend any limits involving which children could get the vaccine. Any parents who want a shot for their child should be able to get one, they said.

In a call with reporters Friday, Peter Marks, who oversees vaccines at the FDA, underscored the point, noting that at least one-third of children who are hospitalized with covid do not have identifiable risk factors, making it important to make the vaccine broadly available.

"Everyone 5 to 11 is still at risk of serious disease," agreed Paul A. Offit, a vaccine expert at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and a member of the FDA advisory committee. "I don't think [the CDC] will layer it."

Offit said there is always some uncertainty in trying to predict side effects that are so rare they show up only when vaccines are used in vast numbers of people.

"You go with the best data you have and hope you made the right decision," he said. "A decision not to release the vaccine is also a decision, one to let children potentially get infected and potentially die."

Peter Hotez, a vaccine expert at Baylor College of Medicine, said he was concerned that the FDA advisers, in debating the vaccine so vociferously, were "damning [the vaccine] with faint praise."

"It's great that people are seeing the sausage being made," he said, but some of the skeptical comments "could chill the acceptance of some parents of the vaccine."

But Paul Spearman, director of infectious diseases at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center and a member of the FDA advisory committee, said the debate was "just part of the process ... that is what we are supposed to do, dig in deeper." Spearman did not take part in the meeting because he has worked on coronavirus vaccines, including Pfizer-BioNTech's.

He said he was confident doctors would be able to persuade the wavering "wait-and-see" parents to get their children vaccinated. "This group needs to see that their trusted health-care providers are in favor of it and that kids are doing great after they get it," he said.

The effectiveness data for the authorization came from an ongoing trial with about 4,700 children 5 to 11 years old who received the lower dose of the vaccine, the agency said. The FDA compared their immune responses to those of participants 16 to 25 years old who had received the adult dose in a previous study, and found the responses were comparable.

The trial was considered too small to detect rare complications, so the FDA produced an extensive [analysis](#) to try to determine the risk of cardiac side effects in children 5 to 11 years [old](#). It compared the estimated number of covid-related illnesses, hospitalizations and deaths that would be prevented by the vaccine with the number of predicted myocarditis cases, hospitalizations and deaths caused by the vaccine.

Under most scenarios, the vaccine's benefits outweigh its risks. The only exception was when the virus was circulating at very low levels. Even then, the agency said, the benefits might very well outweigh the risks because covid is so much more dangerous than vaccine-induced myocarditis.

The FDA officials, in the call with reporters, tried to assuage [parental fears](#) about the potential of long-term side effects, including on their children's fertility.

"There is no evidence that there is an adverse effect on fertility" from the vaccine, Marks said. "And there is no reason why one would suspect" that mRNA vaccines such as those made by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna would harm fertility. He emphasized that the FDA and the CDC have several systems for monitoring vaccine safety for all age groups.

The FDA officials also said that although covid cases are declining, there could be a resurgence in cold weather and parents should not delay getting their children vaccinated.

As the release date for the pediatric vaccine approaches, anti-vaccine activity has exploded. FDA officials and members of the advisory committee report being deluged with emails and phone calls from people urging them to reject the vaccine and threatening lawsuits if they didn't. "I'm getting ugly, virulent emails," Rubin said.

On the other end of the spectrum, Piper Ryan, 46, is eager to get the vaccine for her 9-year-old son, Teague. He has been playing tennis and having outdoor play dates, but still is taking virtual classes at home. With the winter holidays approaching, they are both anxious for Teague to get his first dose.

Ryan, who lives in Great Falls, Va., said she wants to host Thanksgiving dinner with her extended family this year — it would be their first holiday gathering since the pandemic began. But Ryan said she would feel comfortable inviting out-of-state relatives only if her son had some protection against the virus.

"As soon as it is authorized, we're absolutely going to get him vaccinated," Ryan said.

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HEADLINE	10/30 CDC: unvaccinated kids foreign travelers
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/10/30/cdc-quarantine-unvaccinated-children-travelers/
GIST	<p>Foreign-national children who have not been vaccinated against the coronavirus will not need to self-quarantine for seven days upon arrival in the United States, health officials said Saturday.</p> <p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued an amended order clarifying its position Saturday after some international travelers raised concerns about their children needing to self-quarantine for that long under new rules that will apply once a travel ban on visitors from 33 countries is lifted on Nov. 8.</p> <p>The United States is lifting travel restrictions that have meant most foreign nationals who have been in the United Kingdom, several European Union countries, Brazil or China in the previous 14 days are not permitted to enter the United States. Most non-U. S. citizens and nonimmigrants arriving by air will be required to show both proof of vaccination and proof of a negative coronavirus test taken within three days of departure.</p>

People younger than 18 are exempted from the vaccine requirement, because — unlike in the United States, where vaccinations for adolescents are widely available — in many countries, children do not have access to or are not yet eligible for the vaccines, the CDC has said.

But airlines and others had been pressing for quarantine changes for foreign children, saying it would harm international tourism if children had to self-quarantine upon arrival. The latest exemption from quarantine also applies to unvaccinated foreign visitors who are part of clinical trials.

“Based on the potential difficulty that self-quarantine may pose to children under 18 years of age especially when accompanied by a vaccinated parent or guardian who is not required to self-quarantine, CDC has determined that self-quarantine should not be required,” the amended order reads.

Children will still be required to attest — or have a parent or guardian attest on their behalf — that they will arrange to be tested for the virus between three and five days after arrival, and to self-isolate if the test is positive or if symptoms develop, the CDC said.

The CDC “strongly recommends” vaccination for all eligible children under 18. Vaccines for children ages 5 to 11 could be available as soon as the first week of November after an independent panel of vaccine experts said Tuesday that the Food and Drug Administration should grant emergency authorization to administer the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine in that age group.

The new travel rules don’t require U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents to be vaccinated but do outline different testing requirements depending on their vaccine status. It will be up to airlines to verify a person’s vaccination and testing status, officials have said.

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HEADLINE	10/30 Mayoral campaigns shift to ‘law and order’
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/10/30/crime-mayors-races/
GIST	<p>Mayoral candidates across the country are closing out their campaigns pledging to restore law and order, a major setback for racial justice protesters who only a year ago thought they had permanently reshaped the debate on policing in American cities.</p> <p>As voters head to the polls Tuesday, local elections are dominated by discussions about safety and law enforcement amid a surge in violent crime. The tone of the debate, even in many liberal urban communities, highlights how major policing reforms have stalled.</p> <p>From Buffalo to Seattle, Democratic politicians who once championed significant reductions or reallocations of police department budgets are backtracking. In other cities, including Cleveland, liberal candidates are being hammered over their stances on public safety.</p> <p>And even in cities without a competitive mayor’s race, the question of how to get tough on crime and bolster public safety has emerged as a defining issue. In Miami Beach, for example, Mayor Dan Gelber (D) is campaigning for a controversial referendum that would ban the sale of alcohol at bars and nightclubs after 2 a.m., which the mayor says is needed to regain control of the city after a tumultuous year of unruly behavior and gun violence. Gelber is also exploring how Miami Beach can hire more police officers.</p> <p>“My residents are saying ‘we need to crackdown’, or ‘we need to have zero tolerance,’ ” said Gelber, adding that his party has been hampered by public perceptions that it is soft on crime.</p> <p>The shift in the political strategies among big-city politicians, many of whom are Democrats, comes as a new poll shows public support for traditional policing strategies has increased since last year, when the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis galvanized the Black Lives Matter movement and powered its “defund the police” slogan.</p>

A Pew Research Center poll [published Tuesday](#) shows that 47 percent of Americans want to increase funding for police, compared to 15 percent who want to decrease funding. Last June, when the racial justice protests were at their peak, 31 percent of Americans wanted to increase funding while 25 percent supported a decrease. Three-fourths of Black Americans, who form a decisive voting bloc in many mayoral contests, either support increasing or keeping spending on police the same, Pew found.

The shift in public opinion comes after the U.S. cities [experienced a 30 percent jump](#) in killings in 2020, the largest one-year increase since the federal government began compiling national figures in the 1960s.

In many cities, the number of homicides continued to rise this year, though at a slower rate than in 2020. At the same time, many large police departments have seen a decline in the number of active officers, fueling residents' sense of unease.

Ned Hill, an Ohio State University professor who studies urban politics, said the shift on police occurred quickly, forcing local politicians to recalibrate their public safety message. The tenor of the debate in many mayoral races moved even further in favor of police this fall, after Eric Adams, a former NYPD captain who campaigned on fighting crime, [won the Democratic nomination for mayor in New York](#).

"Mayors aren't stupid, and they understand if taxpaying residents of their city start leaving, as they did in the 1970s, the whole city is endangered," said Hill, who teaches economics at Ohio State's John Glenn College of Public Affairs. "But more importantly, they understand it's the home-owning residents who turn out to vote in nonpresidential election years, and it's those residents who feel most affected by crime."

Mayoral candidates who only a few months ago were on the front lines of the police-reform movement have been moderating their positions ahead of Tuesday's election.

In Buffalo, community activist India Walton is attempting to become the country's first socialist mayor in decades after she defeated the incumbent mayor, Byron Brown, in the June Democratic primary. Walton's bid for public office grew out of the racial justice protests that swept the nation following Floyd's murder, and she had been a fixture at Black Lives Matter demonstrations.

Before her campaign for mayor, Walton embraced calls to shift resources away from police. According [to the Buffalo News](#), Walton used expletive-laden anti-police chants at a rally. Her affiliation with the Black Lives Matter movement has become fodder for Brown, who is mounting a write-in campaign.

On the campaign trail, Walton has largely stopped talking about cutting funding for police and instead stresses the need for accountability for police misconduct and a greater role for mental health professionals in responding to residents in distress.

Jesse Myerson, a spokesman for the Walton campaign, said Walton does not recall using profanity on the campaign trail last year. Myerson added Walton has shifted away from the "slogans of activists" during moments of "searing injustice" and is now focused on becoming an effective mayor.

"India has transitioned from one to the other, and that accounts for the change in rhetoric," said Myerson, adding Walton still supports diverting \$7.5 million of the Buffalo Police Department's \$86 million annual budget. "But what stays the same is her commitment to justice, and her determination that we have a society that fosters safety, health and accountability."

A poll released Tuesday by WIVB-TV and Emerson College showed Brown [holds](#) a 17-point lead in the race.

In Seattle, a city that experienced a 73 percent increase in homicides last year, City Council president and mayoral candidate M. Lorena González is also on the defensive over her past support for reducing police funding in that city by as much as 50 percent, and diverting that money to social programs.

González's chief opponent in the race, former council member Bruce Harrell, is hammering González for that stance, arguing city homeowners and businesses are clamoring for safer streets in a city that has lost about 300 police officers in the last year.

"Make no mistake about it, I am not defunding the police," Harrell charged in a debate on Thursday night. "My opponent has made it clearly a purpose-driven part [of her campaign] to defund the police."

González responded by saying she still wants to "invest in community-based safety and non-law enforcement systems" but will also "fully support hiring plans" to add more officers to the Seattle Police Department.

Several recent polls suggest that [Harrell now leads](#) González.

Justin Hansford, executive director of the Thurgood Marshall Civil Rights Center at Howard University, said big-city political dynamics this fall highlight how the Black Lives Matter movement has faded as a political force.

Hansford, a onetime Black Lives Matter activist, said the movement is suffering from its diffuse leadership structure, most notably that Black Lives Matter never established a clear leader or political arm. As a result, Hansford said the movement has been unable to fight back against its critics or organize itself politically, which has made it easier for Democratic leaders to distance themselves from the group's message.

"That lack of cohesion, what that does, is it means you cannot come up with a counter-strategy that everyone can agree on, and you can't come up with a long-term strategy," Hansford said. "We always knew there would pushback to changing policing, but what is surprising is how quickly Democrats are back to a law-and-order narrative."

In some mayoral contests, candidates have been on the defensive for even publicly supporting the Black Lives Matter movement last year. In Park City, Utah, a liberal island in an otherwise conservative state, Mayor Andy Beerman has faced criticism during his reelection campaign for authorizing a "Black Lives Matter" mural on a city street last year, [the Salt Lake Tribune reported](#).

Chanelle Helm, a leader of a Black Lives Matter chapter in Louisville, which does not hold a mayor's race until next year, said organizers have always understood that their campaign to "fundamentally change policing" would be a tough slog.

"Resting is a part of this, because it is a long-term battle," Helm said. "You lose some battles. You win some battles. But you still have to rest, because you know the GOP is still going to organize. White supremacy is still going to organize, and centrist Democrats are still going to organize."

And despite setbacks for movement, Bruce Katz, director of the Nowak Metro Finance Lab at Drexel University, said the current political environment in major cities still largely aligns with the goals of the Black Lives Matter movement. He notes that many candidates couch their requests for more police officers with promises to also hold them accountable while investing in social and mental health programs to deter crime and arrests.

"Mayoral candidates are being compelled to respond to realities on the ground. But the response to those realities is going to be dramatically informed by what happened to George Floyd and it will not be the response we would have seen in 2018 or 2019," Katz said. "There will be a much more thoughtful, broader, comprehensive response."

But one test of how voters balance these competing needs will come in Cleveland, where residents are voting both for a new mayor and on a referendum to fundamentally change oversight of city police.

Cleveland's police department has been in turmoil since an officer shot and killed 12-year-old Tamir Rice in 2014 while Rice [held a toy gun](#). A year later, the department entered into a consent decree with the Justice Department after it was determined the department engaged in pattern of excessive force.

In response to concerns about the department, voters are considering a ballot question that would create a civilian commission that could fire or discipline officers. Political analysts once expected the measure to pass handily.

But in recent weeks, the referendum has emerged as the main point of contention between the two candidates for mayors.

In a September primary, Justin Bibb, a Black 34-year-old nonprofit executive, was the top vote-getter after he rallied a diverse coalition of young and left-leaning voters to the polls. In Tuesday's runoff election, however, Bibb finds himself locked in a tight race against City Council President Kevin Kelley, who using public safety issues to rally older, more conservative voters behind his candidacy.

Kelley, 54, has been arguing that Issue 24 — and Bibb's vocal support for it — will divert resources away from city police after [Cleveland saw 177 homicides last year](#) — a pace that continues to accelerate this year. Kelley, who is White, has also argued that an expansion of the board's powers will force officers to leave the force.

"From everything we have seen, from polling to knocking on front doors, to any conversation we have had with people, crime and safety is the absolute number-one issue in every neighborhood in the city of Cleveland," Kelley said. "We are already down almost 200 uniformed police officers, and we just cannot afford this risk" of enacting Issue 24.

In an interview, Bibb accused Kelley of "using Trump talking points" against him, a reference to President Donald Trump's "law-and-order" campaign strategy last year.

"I will not run away from this narrative that you can't have effective law enforcement while also focusing on police accountability and equal justice under the law," Bibb said.

Still, Bibb concedes his task has become harder this year because many voters think Democrats want to "defund the police."

"It was the worst label, and the worst branding in American political history," Bibb said. "It boxed many of us in, because anytime we talk about police accountability or police reform, the other side says it is 'defund the police' and we don't support police officers."

"And when we [Democrats] overplayed our hands with defund the police, we are forced to go back to the other extreme," Bibb added.

One city where the political whiplash has been especially intense is Atlanta, where 14 candidates are [vying to replace Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms \(D\)](#).

Last summer, following citywide protests after an Atlanta police officer shot a man in the back as he attempted to flee, many city leaders advocated for broad reforms to policing. The Atlanta City Council came within one vote of temporarily slashing its police budget by nearly a third.

Now, amid a sharp increase in homicides and carjackings, the issue of police reform is not even brought up on the campaign trail as the candidates instead discuss how to quickly hire more officers.

One leading candidate, former mayor Kasim Reed (D), is aligning himself with Atlanta's police union, an unthinkable political decision just a year ago when the city rallied behind Black Lives Matter.

	“We have to support the women and the men of the police department,” Reed said while picking up the endorsement. “Because if we don’t, we are going to lose Atlanta.”
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HEADLINE	10/31 Pulled over: deadly police traffic stops
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/31/us/police-killings-traffic-stops-takeaways.html
GIST	<p>When Daunte Wright was killed last spring by a police officer in Minnesota after being pulled over for expired registration tags, the case drew national attention. So have several other seemingly avoidable deaths of motorists.</p> <p>Now, a New York Times investigation reveals the scope of such cases across the country — and why traffic stops for minor offenses can escalate into fatal encounters.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over the last five years, The Times found, the police killed more than 400 drivers or passengers who were not wielding a gun or a knife or under pursuit for a violent crime. • Traffic stops — which are often motivated by hidden budgetary considerations because of the ticket revenue they generate — are the most common interactions between police officers and the public. Yet the police consider them among the most dangerous things they do. • That presumption of peril has been significantly overstated, but it has become ingrained in police culture and court precedents — contributing to impunity for most officers who use lethal force at vehicle stops. <p>Here are some other key findings.</p> <p>How encounters escalate</p> <p>Many of the vehicle stops The Times reviewed began for common traffic violations like broken taillights, or for questioning about nonviolent offenses like shoplifting.</p> <p>From there, things escalated. More than three-quarters of the motorists were killed trying to flee. In dozens of encounters, officers stepped in front of moving vehicles or reached inside car windows, then fired their guns, claiming self-defense.</p> <p>In other cases, the police responded aggressively to disrespect or defiance, punishing what some officers call “contempt of cop.”</p> <p>“We have got to take him out,” an Oklahoma state trooper declared over the radio in 2019 to patrolmen chasing a man suspected of shoplifting vodka. The officers forced his S.U.V. from the road, opened a door as it rolled slowly past and shot from both sides, killing the driver.</p> <p>Few convictions, but settlement payouts</p> <p>In case after case, officers avoided criminal liability when they claimed to have acted in self-defense. In the roughly 400 deaths, five officers were convicted. Nearly two dozen cases are still pending. While prosecutors deemed most of the killings justifiable, local governments paid at least \$125 million to resolve legal claims in about 40 cases.</p> <p>Overstated risks stoke fears</p> <p>Trainers often use misleading statistics and gory dashcam videos of drivers gunning down officers during traffic stops to teach cadets to be hypervigilant, The Times found.</p> <p>“All you’ve heard are horror stories about what could happen,” said Sarah Mooney, assistant police chief in West Palm Beach. “It is very difficult to try to train that out of somebody.”</p> <p>There are genuine risks, but studies have found that an officer’s chances of ending up dead at a vehicle stop are less than 1 in 3.6 million. Over the past five years, and at least 100 million traffic stops, motorists who had been pulled over killed about 60 police officers, primarily by gunshots, according to a Times analysis.</p>

A financial incentive to stop motorists

Many communities rely heavily on ticket revenue to fund their budgets, effectively turning their officers into revenue agents searching for violations, even minor ones, to support municipal needs — including their own pay raises.

For example, Valley Brook, Okla., a town of under 900 people, collects roughly \$1 million from traffic cases annually.

The federal government also contributes to the traffic stops with \$600 million a year in highway safety grants that reward ticket writing. In applying for these grants, at least 20 states have used the number of traffic stops per hour to evaluate police performance, a practice that critics say encourages overpolicing.

Evidence of racial bias

In the deaths reviewed by The Times, Black drivers were overrepresented relative to the population. Kalfani Ture, a criminologist and former Georgia police officer who is Black, said overstating the risks to officers compounded racial bias.

“Police think ‘vehicle stops are dangerous’ and ‘Black people are dangerous,’ and the combination is volatile,” he said.

The problem is especially acute at so-called pretextual stops, he added, where officers seek out minor violations — expired registration, tinted windows — to search a car they consider suspicious.

Going beyond the ‘final frame’

Criminologists call it officer-created jeopardy when the police put themselves in harm’s way by stepping in front of a moving car or reaching inside a car window.

Many courts do not consider those circumstances, focusing only on the “final frame” when an officer pulled the trigger at a moment of imminent harm. That standard has given the police broad protection from legal accountability.

Some argue that judges and juries should scrutinize the actions of officers before they opened fire. The Times’s visual investigations team did just that, rewinding video from more than 100 deadly traffic stops and breaking down three cases in minute detail. The footage suggests that dozens of deaths could have been avoided had police officers not put themselves in danger.

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/31/us/police-traffic-stops-killings.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/31/us/police-ticket-quotas-money-funding.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/10/30/video/police-traffic-stops-danger-video.html>

HEADLINE	10/30 Gulf States pull ambassadors from Lebanon
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/30/world/middleeast/lebanon-ambassadors-saudi-gulf.html
GIST	<p>CAIRO — A diplomatic crisis between several wealthy Persian Gulf states and their tiny, cash-strapped Arab neighbor, Lebanon, expanded on Saturday as the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait pulled their ambassadors from Beirut, one day after Saudi Arabia and Bahrain did the same.</p> <p>The Gulf nations said they were withdrawing their diplomats in response to comments made by Lebanon’s information minister, George Kordahi, who called the war in Yemen a Saudi and Emirati “aggression” in a recent television interview. In addition to recalling their envoys, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain also expelled Lebanon’s ambassadors from their countries.</p> <p>Although Saudi Arabia’s military campaign to oust the Iran-backed Houthi rebels from Yemen has been widely condemned in the West and by its archenemy, Iran, its Arab neighbors have avoided antagonizing the kingdom, given its role as regional heavyweight and banker.</p>

With a few stray comments from a minor minister, Lebanon once again found itself caught in the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, underscoring just how vulnerable it is to the whims of its more powerful neighbors.

Mr. Kordahi is aligned with Hezbollah, the Iran-backed political party and militia that dominates Lebanese politics.

The weekend's diplomatic spat comes on the heels of an already terrible year for Lebanon, a state in rapid financial and political decline. Seventy-eight percent of Lebanon's population is estimated to be living in poverty amid an economic collapse that has enormously inflated prices, rendered the currency nearly worthless, swallowed people's savings and caused near-continuous power cuts and fuel shortages. The country can ill afford further problems with its rich neighbors or threats to the foreign investments on which it relies.

Saudi Arabia was once an important source of financial support for Lebanon. The Saudi government contributed billions of dollars to keep the country in its orbit and Saudi citizens spent lavishly on investments and summer vacations. But the Saudi government [withdrew that support](#) several years ago as Hezbollah grew in prominence and the country came under Iran's thrall.

"The current crisis is pure politics," said Khaldoun el-Sherif, a political analyst in Lebanon. "The Saudis consider Lebanon as having fallen completely within the Hezbollah-Iran axis."

Lebanon's prime minister, Najib Mikati, issued a statement suggesting Mr. Kordahi resign to defuse tensions, but Mr. Kordahi said earlier this week that he would not step down. In May Lebanon's foreign minister was [forced to resign](#) after suggesting that the predominately Sunni Gulf States contributed to the rise of the Islamic State terror group.

Despite the already strained relations, the diplomatic fracas triggered a crisis in Beirut. President Michel Aoun of Lebanon, recognizing the gravity of the Gulf States' reaction, on Saturday called an emergency meeting with other Lebanese leaders, saying that he was eager to reestablish good relations with Saudi Arabia.

Fawzi Kabbara, Lebanon's newly expelled ambassador to Riyadh, told Al Nahar, a Lebanese newspaper, that he remained hopeful that relations could return to normal if certain "demands" were met. It was unclear what those demands were.

Mr. Kordahi, the Lebanese minister whose comments kicked off the crisis, gave the television interview weeks before he was appointed minister, but it did not become public until several days ago. He said in the interview that Yemen's Houthi rebels were "defending themselves" against "an external aggression," adding that "homes, villages, funerals and weddings were being bombed" by the Saudi and Emirati coalition.

He called their military campaign in Yemen "futile" and said it was "time for it to end."

On Saturday, the United Arab Emirates, the powerful, oil-rich Gulf state that has been Saudi Arabia's biggest partner in the Yemen war, withdrew its ambassador to Lebanon and banned its citizens from traveling there. The decision came "in solidarity with the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in light of the unacceptable approach by some Lebanese officials toward the Kingdom," an Emirati minister of state, Khalifa Shaheen al-Marar, said in a statement.

Earlier on Saturday, Saudi Arabia's tiny neighbor, Kuwait, recalled its ambassador to Lebanon and gave the Lebanese ambassador 48 hours to leave, its official news agency reported. The foreign ministry said Kuwait had done so because of the Lebanese government's "failure" to "address the unacceptable and reprehensible statements against the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the rest" of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

Critics of Saudi Arabia's heavy handed maneuvering accused the kingdom of taking potshots at an already wounded Lebanon.

"When a nonentity minister in Lebanon says something vaguely critical of Saudi Arabia, they overreact and engage in collective punishment, because Lebanon is weak and poor and it is easy to kick a horse when it is down," Karim Traboulsi, the managing editor of The New Arab, a Pan-Arab publication, wrote on Facebook. "I hope that in my lifetime Lebanon becomes free and self reliant, because dignity is the most precious thing."

Criticisms similar to those made by Mr. Kordahi have also come from Western politicians and advocacy groups, which accuse Saudi Arabia of causing thousands of civilian casualties, indiscriminately bombing civilian targets and prolonging a war that has dragged Yemen to the brink of famine, destroyed its infrastructure and gutted its economy.

A United Nations report in September charged both sides of the war — the Saudi-led coalition, which was supported by [American military aid](#), and the Iran-backed Houthi rebels — with [violating international law by killing civilians](#). It said coalition airstrikes had killed or wounded at least 18,000 Yemeni civilians since 2015, while the Houthis shelled residential neighborhoods, camps for displaced Yemenis, markets and an airport.

Pressure has grown on Saudi Arabia to end the war, with President Biden [stopping American military aid](#) to the coalition in February. But the Houthi rebels [rejected a cease-fire offer](#) from the Saudis earlier this year and hostilities have continued, most recently centering on an area called Marib.

On Saturday, the casualty count grew again, with a car bombing at the airport in Aden, Yemen, that killed at least nine and wounded at least 29, according to a Health Ministry official who asked not to be named because he was not authorized to speak to the news media.

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HEADLINE	10/30 G20: companies' new global minimum tax
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/30/world/europe/g20-biden-corporate-tax-agreement.html
GIST	<p>ROME — President Biden and other world leaders endorsed a landmark global agreement on Saturday that seeks to block large corporations from shifting profits and jobs across borders to avoid taxes, a showcase win for a president who has found raising corporate tax rates an easier sell with other countries than with his own party in Congress.</p> <p>The announcement in the opening session of the Group of 20 summit marked the world's most aggressive attempt yet to stop opportunistic companies like Apple and Bristol Myers Squibb from sheltering profits in so-called tax havens, where tax rates are low and corporations often maintain little physical presence beyond an official headquarters.</p> <p>It is a deal years in the making, which was pushed over the line by the sustained efforts of Mr. Biden's Treasury Department, even as the president's plans to raise taxes in the United States for new social policy and climate change programs have fallen short of his promises.</p> <p>The revenue expected from the international pact is now critical to Mr. Biden's domestic agenda, an unexpected outcome for a president who has presented himself more as a deal maker at home rather than abroad.</p> <p>Leaders hailed the agreement, which was negotiated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development with nearly 140 countries signing on. "Today, every G20 head of state endorsed an historic agreement on new international tax rules, including a global minimum tax that will end the damaging race to the bottom on corporate taxation," Treasury Secretary Janet L. Yellen, who joined Mr. Biden in Rome, said in a statement. "It's a critical moment for the U.S. and the global economy."</p>

The agreement would impose a minimum 15 percent corporate tax rate in nearly every country in the world and punish the few holdouts who refuse to go along. The O.E.C.D. estimates the accord will raise \$150 billion per year globally from tax-fleeing companies.

Such an agreement was not the top tax promise on Mr. Biden's campaign agenda when he won the White House. But it has become the centerpiece of Mr. Biden's efforts to raise corporate taxes back home, in order to fund a sprawling domestic agenda that includes investing in child care and fighting climate change, and to shift the global balance of power toward American workers.

But so far, Mr. Biden has failed to deliver on his pledge to raise the corporate income tax rate to 28 percent from 21 percent, partly undoing a rate cut signed by President Donald J. Trump, which lowered the rate from 35 percent. Mr. Biden announced a new plan to unite Democrats around that agenda on Thursday, shortly before leaving for Rome, but it did not include an increase in the corporate rate.

Instead, his framework contained two new 15 percent minimum taxes: one on the income American companies earn abroad, and one on the profits that large corporations report to their shareholders.

It also proposed penalties for companies that operate in the United States but keep their headquarters in countries that refuse to join the global deal and put in place a similar minimum tax.

The global minimum tax that Mr. Biden endorsed would be enacted separately by every country, in an attempt to eliminate havens with rock-bottom tax rates. Those companies that still use havens would face tax penalties in the United States.

Mr. Biden's proposed domestic minimum tax would exclude a few deductions, like for clean energy, but otherwise try to raise money from companies that have reduced their tax bills through a variety of incentives in the code like deductions for investment.

The Biden administration estimates these measures, along with other changes to the international side of the tax code, will raise \$350 billion in tax revenue over a decade.

Mr. Biden said he was confident that Democrats would unite behind the framework after months of turbulent negotiations. But it still has not passed Congress, and it is still unclear whether Mr. Biden has the votes.

Administration officials, who have made it their goal to end the global practice of profit-shifting, celebrated the international tax provisions this week and said they would be significant steps toward Mr. Biden's vision of a global economy where companies invest, hire and book more profits in the United States.

But they also conceded that infighting among congressional Democrats had left Mr. Biden short of fulfilling his promise to make corporations pay their "fair share," disappointing those who have pushed Mr. Biden to reverse lucrative tax cuts for businesses passed under Mr. Trump.

The framework omits a wide range of corporate tax increases that Mr. Biden campaigned on and pushed relentlessly in the first months of his presidency. He could not persuade 50 Senate Democrats to raise the corporate income tax rate to 28 percent from 21 percent, or even to a compromise 25 percent, or to eliminate incentives that allow some large firms — like fossil fuel producers — to reduce their tax bills.

"It's a tiny, tiny, tiny, tiny, step," Erica Payne, the president of a group called Patriotic Millionaires that has urged tax increases on corporations and the wealthy, said in a statement after Mr. Biden's framework announcement on Friday. "But it's a step."

Business groups fought the president's plans to raise corporate taxes, with the help of some Democrats in the House and Senate, and they denounced the increases included in Mr. Biden's framework. The National

Association of Manufacturers said in a statement that the domestic minimum tax would punish investment and “harm our industry’s ability to drive our economic recovery.”

Infighting among Democrats also jeopardized the Biden administration’s strategy to raise \$700 billion in tax revenue without increasing tax rates at all. Plans to invest \$80 billion in strengthening the I.R.S. and making banks to provide the agency with more information about the finances of their customers have faced fierce opposition from lawmakers, who are poised to jettison the bank reporting requirement.

The administration is continuing to negotiate with skeptical lawmakers to find a way to keep the I.R.S. policy alive. [The Treasury Department said on Friday](#) that even the additional enforcement money for the I.R.S. could still generate \$400 billion in additional tax revenue over 10 years and said that was a “conservative” estimate.

An administration official said that the difficulty in rolling back the Trump tax cuts was the result of the fact that the Democrats are a big tent party ideologically with a very narrow majority in Congress, where a handful of moderates currently rule.

In Rome, Mr. Biden’s struggle to raise taxes more has not complicated the sealing of the international agreement. The move by the heads of state to commit to putting the deal in place by 2023 looms as the featured achievement of the summit, and Mr. Biden’s surest victory of a European swing that also includes a climate conference in Scotland next week.

Briefing reporters on Friday evening, a senior administration official, speaking on the condition of anonymity in order to preview the first day of the summit, said Biden aides were confident that world leaders were sophisticated and understood the nuances of American politics, including the challenges in passing Mr. Biden’s tax plans in Congress.

The official also said world leaders see the tax deal as reshaping the rules of the global economy.

The international tax agreement represented a significant achievement of economic diplomacy for Mr. Biden and Ms. Yellen, [who dedicated much of her first year on the job to reviving negotiations](#) that stalled during the Trump administration. To show that the United States was serious about a deal, she abandoned a provision that would have made it optional for American companies to pay new taxes to foreign countries and backed away from an initial demand for a global minimum tax of 21 percent.

For months, Ms. Yellen cajoled Ireland’s finance minister, Paschal Donohoe, to back the agreement, which would require Ireland to raise its 12.5 percent corporate tax rate — the centerpiece of its economic model to attract foreign investment. Ultimately, through a mix of pressure and pep talks, Ireland relented, removing a final obstacle that could have prevented the European Union from ratifying the agreement.

Some progressives in the United States say that Mr. Biden’s ability to follow through on his end of the bargain was a crucial piece of the framework spending bill.

“The international corporate reforms are the most important,” said Seth Hanlon, a senior fellow at the liberal Center for American Progress, who specializes in tax policy, “because they are linked to the broader multilateral effort to stop the corporate race to the bottom. It’s so important for Congress to act this year to give that effort momentum.”

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HEADLINE	10/30 Russia pipeline reverses gas flow; politics?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/30/world/europe/russia-gas-pipeline-nordstream-putin.html
GIST	MOSCOW — Natural gas, already in short supply in Europe this fall, began moving away from Germany on Saturday and back toward the east in an unusual reversal in a major Russian pipeline, Russian media reported.

In themselves, the Russian reports were no cause for alarm, and the giant Russian energy firm, Gazprom, said Saturday that it is filling all European orders. One Russian news media report even suggested the flow reversal was a short-term problem caused by balmy weather in Germany over the weekend.

But the reversal is playing out against a backdrop of a politically charged explosion in gas prices in Europe and accusations that the Kremlin is restricting gas supplies for political purposes. One such purpose is to prod the E.U. into approving a new pipeline, Nordstream 2, that would bring gas from Russia directly to Germany, bypassing Eastern Europe.

More broadly, analysts say, the Kremlin may be sending a message about renewable energy, illustrating that too quick a pivot away from natural gas will leave the Continent vulnerable to fickle wind and solar supplies.

Analysts say Russia has for weeks now been slow to supply fuel to make up for shortfalls, often by limiting deliveries to its own storage facilities. The reversal of the direction of flow on the major Yamal-Europe pipeline was seen as a potential new wrinkle.

The pipeline connects Russia to Germany and crosses Belarus and Poland. It accounts for about 20 percent of Russia's overland supply capacity to the European Union, suggesting a significant shortfall if its operations were halted.

A report by the state news agency, Tass, offered no explanation for the change of direction. It cited a German-based energy company, Gascade, saying flows had stopped and even slightly reversed in the Yamal-Europe pipe, sending gas eastward from Germany to Poland.

Gascade did not respond to a request for comment.

The Kremlin has a track record of using gas politically. In the 2000s, Russia twice cut supplies to a Western-leaning government in Ukraine, causing widespread shortages throughout Eastern Europe and leaving people shivering in unheated apartments in mid-January.

To avoid Russian energy embargoes, many Eastern European countries at odds with the Kremlin politically have purchased gas through contracts with other European countries, rather than from Russia directly. This practice became commonplace after the Ukrainian revolution in 2014, when relations between Russia and the West soured.

Ukraine, for example, switched entirely to such "reverse contracts," so called because they suggest that the Russian gas is bought by Western European companies and then "reversed," or sent back to the east.

A report on the Russian news agency Interfax blamed the gas reversal Saturday on these reverse contracts, saying customers in Poland continued drawing from the pipe even as demand in Germany shrank with the warm weather, causing the flow to change direction.

In any case, these deals work only when Russian natural gas is flowing through Eastern European pipelines in transit to the West. In recent years, however, Russia has sought to shift gas supplies to its undersea pipes linking directly to Western Europe, bypassing Eastern Europe and eliminating the possibility for reverse deals.

This is where the Nordstream 2 pipeline comes into play. Critics say the pipeline running under the Baltic Sea to Germany was not really needed but was built by Russia to strengthen the Kremlin's energy leverage in Eastern Europe.

With the pipeline virtually finished, Russia is now seeking approval from German and E.U. regulators to begin operations. President Vladimir V. Putin has blamed Europe's gas crunch on the failure of regulators to approve Nordstream 2 in a timely manner.

	As the gas market crisis deepened in Europe through the fall, Mr. Putin argued that Russia could help — but only if European companies and governments agreed to lock in long-term contracts for supplies from Russia’s undersea pipelines. That, critics say, would ensure a market for Russian gas for years to come despite the move toward renewable energy sources.
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HEADLINE	10/30 Frustration builds over benefits, payroll tax
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/washington-lawmakers-look-at-long-term-care-program-as-frustration-builds-over-benefits-and-payroll-tax/
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA — In 2019, when Washington Rep. Laurie Jenkins stood to speak on behalf of her bill to create a long-term care program, she highlighted the first-in-the-nation moment.</p> <p>The bill that ultimately became the WA Cares program was an ambitious idea to tackle a problem many Washingtonians will face: it created a social-insurance program to help people pay for care for themselves in old age or sickness.</p> <p>“If I could just for a moment say that how very proud I am that Washington will become the first state in the nation to provide long-term care insurance for every worker in the state,” said Jenkins from the House floor the day it passed its final vote.</p> <p>Starting in January, the program imposes a 0.58% payroll deduction on workers in Washington. For someone making \$50,000 a year, that’s \$290 per year. Beginning in 2025, beneficiaries could start claiming up to \$36,500 to help them pay for home care.</p> <p>That could include, among other things, delivered meals and in-home care, transportation, assisted living and nursing home services, and respite for family members giving care.</p> <p>The idea is to give people the resources they’ll need for care and prevent people from spending themselves into poverty.</p> <p>But the fledgling program is off to a rocky start.</p> <p>The only way for working residents to not be included in the program is to take advantage of a one-time opt-out offered this year. To qualify, those people must apply with the Employment Security Department and have purchased a long-term private insurance plan by Monday. On Oct. 1, the first day for residents to apply, the opt-out website crashed.</p> <p>By that point, private insurance companies were already pulling their long-term care policies over concerns that people would purchase them — and then perhaps quickly drop them — to avoid the payroll tax.</p> <p>WA Cares has also encountered increasing resistance over who receives a benefit.</p> <p>Critics — and even some supporters of the program — point to people who will pay into WA Cares but never earn a benefit, such as older people right now who won’t have time to get vested under the current law’s timeline.</p> <p>Others point to workers who could pay in for decades and never receive a dime if they leave Washington to retire elsewhere. A similar problem exists for people who work in Washington but live in Oregon or Idaho, or military families rotating in and out of the region.</p> <p>Meanwhile, scores of businesses, unions and groups — including Microsoft, Amazon, Alaska Airlines and more than 40 local chambers of commerce — penned a letter in September asking Gov. Jay Inslee to delay the program.</p>

In earlier proposed legislation for the program, Jenkins, who has since become speaker of the House, had two Republican co-sponsors.

In 2019, another Republican, Rep. Drew MacEwen, of Union, Mason County, co-sponsored the bill and spoke in favor of it early on before renouncing his support and ultimately voting against the policy.

Now, “I think the best thing the Legislature can do is ideally get rid of it, or delay it and do some serious fixes,” said MacEwen.

In interviews, Democrats acknowledged the rollout has been troubled. But even as they examine changes to improve the policy, Democrats have vowed to move forward without delaying the start of the payroll tax.

A bipartisan commission is set next month to vote on recommendations for lawmakers to consider when they gather for the legislative session that begins in January.

Rep. Nicole Macri, D-Seattle — who along with MacEwen is a member of that group — said Democrats are focused on finding fixes like making sure adults who are older right now can get vested for benefits. But, added Macri, “We will not see proposals from Democrats that would increase payroll deductions.”

Problems and questions

As of Friday, nearly 280,000 residents have applied to [opt-out of the program through the Employment Security Department](#) (ESD). More than 93,000 of those applications have so far been approved, according to the agency.

State Sen. Mark Mullet, a moderate Democrat from Issaquah who voted against the program in 2019, said he’s still waiting for his exemption to be approved.

He described the multistep process through ESD as: “Misery, it was like going to a dentist without Novocain.”

For the 187,000 Washingtonians awaiting confirmation, a delay on processing applications could be problematic, said Mullet. That’s because people authorized to opt-out must show the approved papers to their employer by Jan. 1 to be taken off the payroll tax.

“If you fail to present your ESD approval letter, employers will withhold non-refundable WA Cares premiums,” [according to ESD’s website](#).

Meanwhile, the Long-Term Services and Supports Trust Commission is expected to vote on recommendations on Nov. 10 on recommended changes for lawmakers to consider, Macri said. The commission is composed of lawmakers, officials in government and labor, and other stakeholders.

One focus will be addressing older adults, to make sure they can get benefits when the program starts in 2025.

Right now, an individual must have been contributing to the WA Cares fund for at least 10 years at any point in their lives without a break of five years or more within those 10 years.

For older adults, who don’t have many working years left, a fix in the program might allow them to qualify for benefits by paying in for few years.

So a fix might be aimed, for example, at somebody who “paid for eight total years and didn’t vest,” said Jenkins.

But, “I’m less inclined to say we should delay it, because I’m not sure what advantage that gives to delay it,” she said.

‘Either fix it or scrap it’

Conservative activists have begun collecting signatures for an initiative that, if it qualified, could deal a hefty blow to the program.

Proposed [Initiative 1436](#), if approved by the Legislature, or later, by voters, would allow state residents to opt-out from the program at any time.

“We’re working hard to get it qualified,” said Cary Condotta, co-founder of the group [Restore Washington](#). “We think this is the way to get in front of the Legislature and say, ‘Hey, either fix it or scrap it.’”

“It’s not that it’s a horrible idea, it’s just executed poorly,” added Condotta, a former longtime Republican state lawmaker from Wenatchee.

As an initiative to the Legislature, advocates would have to gather about 325,000 valid signatures by Dec. 30. If it qualifies — by collecting enough signatures — the measure would go first to lawmakers, where they could approve I-1436, or deny it. If they deny it, the initiative would go to the 2022 ballot.

If legislators amended I-1436, both the amended and original version would go before voters in November 2022.

WA Cares has already taken one blow at the ballot box. Last November, Washington voters [rejected a proposed constitutional amendment](#) to allow the trust funds to be invested in stocks — a key move for making the program solvent for several generations.

Supporters of the program and that amendment pointed out that the vote came amid the economic uncertainty of the earlier half of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Jenkins said she isn’t aware of any serious effort to stop or change the program.

In a regularly-scheduled news conference Thursday, Inslee said he wasn’t concerned about the program’s troubles being a liability for Democrats in next year’s elections.

That is “because it’s a good plan and it helps people get care, and we have a lot of people who don’t have care,” said Inslee. “And they don’t want to live in poverty and they don’t want to become wards of the state.”

Backers of the program have already kicked into gear with messaging to explain WA Cares for voters and build support. Democratic state lawmakers have been holding virtual town halls to explain why the measure is needed.

A group, Washingtonians for A Responsible Future, has been sponsoring content [explaining the new program and how it could help people](#). That group is funded partly by Service Employees International Union Local 775, which represents home health-care workers.

SEIU 775 funded most of the campaign last year on the constitutional amendment to invest long-term care trust moneys into stocks and bonds.

Adam Glickman, secretary-treasurer of SEIU 775, said the union — which also backed the original legislation — is open to changes, particularly around getting older Washingtonians benefits.

Labor, meanwhile, will fight to preserve the program.

	“Whether it’s in the legislature or at the ballot, it’s safe to say SEIU will do everything to preserve this program and strengthen it for future generations,” said Glickman. “We will wholeheartedly oppose any efforts to eliminate it.”
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HEADLINE	10/29 Europe climate change crisis: electricity
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/29/climate/europe-energy-crisis-cop.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=Climate%20and%20Environment
GIST	<p>BERLIN — The soaring price of electricity represents a Rorschach test for Europe’s politicians. Depending on their leanings, it is either a reason to wean the continent from fossil fuels more swiftly — or more slowly.</p> <p>The timing is crucial. European Union leaders have cast themselves as the vanguard of a global green transition at the international climate talks that kick off this weekend in Glasgow.</p> <p>The repercussions are vast. How Europe emerges from the current energy crisis will bear on how the world addresses the climate crisis. Europe accounts for a very large share of global emissions produced since the start of the industrial age, and its ability to pivot away from fossil fuels is key to averting ruinous rates of global warming.</p> <p>At the heart of the surge in electricity prices is Europe’s reliance on natural gas to turn on the lights, heat homes, and power industry. Even though most countries in the bloc are moving away from coal faster than other parts of the world, like Asia, they have continued to lean on gas while building out their renewable energy infrastructure.</p> <p>Under European energy rules, the price of gas drives the price of electricity. Gas accounts for a fifth of Europe’s energy consumption, and most of it is imported from Russia.</p> <p>But while natural gas is less polluting than coal, it is still a fossil fuel that produces carbon dioxide emissions that are warming up the planet. And without a gas exit plan, there is no way for Europe to meet its own climate target, which is to reduce its emissions by 55 percent by 2030 compared with 1990 levels.</p> <p>Not Enough Nations have started making progress on climate change. But we’re still on track for dangerous warming unless those efforts accelerate drastically.</p> <p>The power crisis, in other words, is accelerating a reckoning over gas — and foreshadowing what other parts of the world will face as they make their energy transitions.</p> <p>“It’s bringing to the fore the question, ‘What do we do about gas?’” said Lucie Mattera, the Europe analyst for E3G, a climate research group.</p> <p>It is also undermining unity about how to transition to renewables. While policies designed to address climate change are not the main driver of rising electricity prices, some European leaders are claiming that is the case. The cause is basically that demand for gas has soared — sending prices skyward — as the industrialized world has bounced back from the depths of the pandemic and started returning to its normal working rhythm.</p> <p>But some governments across the continent now fear that higher heating bills this winter could bolster populists in upcoming national elections in several countries, or trigger social unrest like the “Yellow Vests” protests from 2018 in France.</p> <p>Those fears have caused several European countries to question the ambitious E.U. target of cutting emissions of planet-warming gases by at least 55 percent within a decade.</p>

Hungary has claimed that rising gas prices are linked to the European Union's climate ambitions, which its prime minister, Viktor Orban, decried as "utopian fantasy." Poland, a major coal producer that has never been a fan of the European Commission's emissions-reductions targets, has pressed Brussels to change or delay some of its proposed measures.

Spain, on the other hand, has pressed for a faster transition to renewable energy, precisely so that the continent isn't forever subjected to the ups and downs of the gas market. "The present and the future belong to renewable energies and we cannot solve a crisis caused precisely by dependence on fossil fuels by looking to the past," Teresa Ribera, its deputy prime minister and a longtime climate advocate, said in an email. "The Spanish government believes that the transition must be accelerated, not slowed down."

Tim Gore at the Brussels-based Institute for European Environmental Policy, a research group, called the price jumps for electricity a "perfect storm." Global demand for gas rose sharply just as winds in Northern Europe (where there is significant wind power) dropped off and gas reserves ran low during a long, lockdown winter. Added to the mix was the closing of coal-burning power plants, largely in Western Europe.

"The fact that the E.U. has succeeded in getting a lot of coal off the energy grid actually makes things worse," Mr. Gore pointed out. "That's a good thing, but it's unfortunate that it happened to coincide with everything else."

The human consequences play out in the 7th floor apartment of Ascención García López in a working class suburb of Madrid, where electricity prices have risen sharply, sparking some protests on the streets.

Ms. López's power bills have nearly doubled since last year, forcing her to change habits. She keeps her blinds open until sundown, so the last rays of sun can light the rooms. She cooks her stews in a pressure cooker, instead of simmering for better flavor. She does the laundry in the middle of the afternoon, when the electricity rates are cheaper, but she fears her neighbors will complain because the middle of the afternoon in Madrid is siesta time.

Ms. López, 56, who is currently unemployed and in charge of caring for two young grandchildren and her elderly mother, hasn't yet had to turn on the heater. Winter worries her. "I will use it only on the coldest days, not every day," she said.

Everyone on a tight budget has come up with their own hacks. Some say they've resorted to unscrewing some of their light bulbs from light fixtures. Others report skipping daily hot showers or cooking big batches of food to save on bills.

Problems like these among voters represent risks to the left-of-center government, for which Ms. Ribera, the deputy prime minister, is also the minister for the ecological transition. Spain has redirected more than 2.6 billion euros in profits from energy companies to consumers, slashed electricity taxes and imposed a cap on how much natural-gas prices are allowed to increase. The energy crisis, Ms. Ribera argued, should not punish the poor.

She compared this moment to the oil crisis of the 1970s. "It is important to share both the risks and the benefits, so the consequences of market behavior are not always paid by the same people," Ms. Ribera said.

Spain is also pushing the European Union to organize a centralized platform for buying natural gas, similar to how its members banded together to negotiate the price of coronavirus vaccines. That approach raises questions relating to the bloc's competition laws, and many members remain skeptical.

The European Commission recently proposed some possible measures that individual members could take, largely focused on protecting the most vulnerable members of society and small businesses, similar to the action taken in Spain, and said it would begin exploring the possibility of shared natural gas reserves. It stressed that speeding up the transition to green energy remained the best solution.

	<p>In many ways, all across the continent, the Achilles' heel of Europe's green transition is gas.</p> <p>Britain, by contrast, has been doubling down on its domestic gas reserves in the North Sea, despite protests by climate campaigners. Norway, which does not belong to the European Union but has set ambitious climate targets modeled after the European Union's, is in the throes of a robust domestic political debate about how much longer it can exploit its North Sea oil and gas resources.</p> <p>The European Commission's climate package aims to reduce gas consumption by a third by 2030, compared with 2015 levels, and virtually eliminate it by 2050. Exactly how to do that is still unclear, and the surge in gas prices is likely to complicate those efforts.</p> <p>The gas question complicates domestic politics. Hungary and France have elections next year. In Germany, higher gas prices could create tension in the future government between the Greens, who are hoping to push for a swift exit from coal, and the Social Democrats, who ran on a strong social justice platform.</p> <p>"Any politician who says this will be simplistic is unrealistic," said Bas Eickhout, a Green Party politician from the Netherlands and member of the European Parliament. "We are rebuilding our economy. That is a huge transition. The phasing of that transition is tricky and has vulnerable moments."</p>
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HEADLINE	10/30 Sudan pro-democracy groups defy coup
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/30/world/africa/sudan-protests-coup.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=World%20News
GIST	<p>NAIROBI, Kenya — Two people were killed in Sudan as protesters flooded the streets on Saturday, a doctors' group said, as pro-democracy groups defied the military coup this week that ushered in a new era of uncertainty for one of Africa's largest countries.</p> <p>Activists called for a "march of millions" days after Lt. Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the military chief, dissolved the joint civilian-military government that took shape after the 2019 ouster of Omar Hassan al-Bashir, Sudan's longtime dictator. On Monday, General al-Burhan ordered the arrests of the prime minister and other top civilian leaders, imposed a nationwide state of emergency and said the military would establish a new government. He promised elections in July 2023.</p> <p>The news led to widespread demonstrations over the week, as protesters in the capital, Khartoum, and other Sudanese towns and cities called for a return to civilian rule. Security forces responded with violence, killing at least seven people and injuring 170 others, according to the pro-democracy Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors. Professional and trade unions called for civil disobedience; many banks, schools and shops closed their doors, and many federal and state government workers stayed home.</p> <p>Analysts said the protests on Saturday, and the security forces' response to them, would be a litmus test for the military, which has a history of bloody crackdowns. Many Sudanese vividly remember June 3, 2019, when security forces violently dispersed protests in the capital, raping and killing dozens of people and dumping some of their bodies in the Nile.</p> <p>As protests gained momentum nationwide Saturday afternoon, the doctors' group said in a Facebook post that two people had been killed in the city of Omdurman, which neighbors the capital, Khartoum. One of the protesters died of a gunshot wound to the head, the other to the stomach, the group said.</p> <p>Security forces were firing live bullets on protesters, the doctors' group said, and added that there had been several injuries.</p> <p>The deaths and injuries came despite repeated calls by American and United Nations officials for peaceful protests to be permitted.</p>

On Friday night, the United Nations special envoy for Sudan met [Gen. Mohamed Hamdan](#), famously known as Hemeti, who leads the much-dreaded paramilitary Rapid Support Forces. They played a role in the latest coup. The envoy, Volker Perthes, [said on Twitter](#) that he emphasized to the general the need to “avoid any confrontation” with protesters.

The U.S. special envoy to the Horn of Africa, Jeffrey Feltman, also said he had spoken with [General al-Burhan](#) and other top officials on Friday and warned against a violent response to the planned rallies.

“The Sudanese people must be allowed to protest peacefully this weekend, and the United States will be watching closely,” [Mr. Feltman's office tweeted](#).

Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken reinforced that message. “The United States continues to stand with Sudan’s people in their nonviolent struggle for democracy,” [he tweeted](#). “Sudan’s security forces must respect human rights; any violence against peaceful demonstrators is unacceptable.”

Pro-democracy groups have rejected the possibility of recognizing or negotiating with a military government, instead demanding that all civilian leaders, including [Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok](#), who is now under house arrest, be released. The U.N. envoy, Mr. Perthes, [said in a statement](#) that he was in contact with all sides and was trying to mediate “toward a peaceful solution to the current crisis.”

Tensions over the possibility of a coup had been brewing for months, as civilian groups accused the military of wanting to cling to power and resisting efforts to hold commanders accountable for atrocities under Mr. al-Bashir, the ousted dictator.

Amid a nationwide internet blackout, protesters carrying Sudanese flags gathered at noon in neighborhoods in Khartoum and Omdurman before marching to major streets and bus stations. Many could be heard chanting, “The people are stronger and the revolution will continue.” Others carried banners reading, “No to military rule.”

In El Fasher, a town in the North Darfur region in northwestern Sudan, the army closed the market and sent people home, according to an aid official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to minimize any potential risk to his organization’s operations.

The cities of Geneina in West Darfur and Gedaref in the east also had a heavy military and police presence, the official said. In some cities, military officers cleared blockades of bricks, slabs and tree branches that protesters had placed across roads to stop them from gaining access to neighborhoods.

On Saturday, protests took place not only in Sudan but in cities around the world with substantial Sudanese populations. Demonstrators against the coup were on the streets in Australia, Indonesia, Italy, Lebanon and Norway.

“We have been in shock about what’s been happening in Sudan,” Elhussein Yasin, a board member of the Sudanese Diaspora Roundtable in Britain, said by telephone. He said protests had been organized in major British cities including London, Birmingham and Cardiff, urging British lawmakers to press the Sudanese generals to give up power.

“We are protesting to say no to a military coup and yes to democracy,” Mr. Yasin said.

On Friday, Amnesty International called on Sudanese generals to investigate the killings of protesters earlier in the week and to prosecute those involved.

Deprose Muchena, Amnesty International’s regional director for east and southern Africa, said the military leaders “must make no mistake about it: The world is watching and will not tolerate further bloodshed.”

	<p>The coup and the ensuing protests are the latest signs of instability in the northeast African nation, which has been hobbled by rising economic hardships, the coronavirus pandemic and shortages of medicine and fuel. This week, the United States froze \$700 million in direct assistance to Sudan's government, the World Bank suspended all disbursements to the country, and the European Union threatened to follow suit.</p> <p>The African Union suspended Sudan, and the generals have been condemned by leaders and governments around the world. President Biden said he "admired the courage of the Sudanese people in demanding their voices be heard."</p> <p>Some within Sudan's military have been surprised by the degree of public resistance to the coup, and rivalries among the generals are beginning to emerge, said Ed Hobeys-Hamsher, the senior Africa analyst at Verisk Maplecroft, a global risk intelligence company based in Britain.</p> <p>"The fate of the coup still hangs in the balance," he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/30 Rural west, landowners become firefighters
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/30/us/wildfires-landowners-trucks.html
GIST	<p>PALISADES, Wash. — Molly Linville vividly remembers the "wall of flame" that tore through the grasslands of her 600-acre ranch during the Sutherland fire four years ago. Working quickly, she managed to guide her 125 cattle into the irrigated field surrounding her home three hours east of Seattle. After that day, Ms. Linville resolved she would never go through an experience like that again.</p> <p>Ms. Linville is one of a growing number of Americans across the rural west who are taking fire management into their own hands: buying surplus fire trucks, construction rigs and converted military vehicles online to protect their homes and land. Some have maintained fire defenses for decades. Others were spurred by a close call with a recent wildfire.</p> <p>Many professional firefighters look warily on the movement, concerned it may give untrained homeowners a false sense of security, especially when residents disregard evacuation orders to stay and fight fires.</p> <p>Deputy Chief Nick Schuler, a spokesman for Cal Fire, California's firefighting agency, put it starkly: "A person who has a gun and can fly in a helicopter doesn't make them trained for war. And just because the civilian is able to buy a fire engine, does not make them properly trained to utilize it."</p> <p>Marin County fire Battalion Chief Graham Groneman advises residents to invest in home hardening, the process of modifying a home so it is more fire-resistant, and defensible space rather than heavy machinery. He worries that residents eager to protect their property may put themselves at greater risk.</p> <p>Still, he says his department tries to work collaboratively with property owners who are determined to help fight a fire. "They want to take some ownership in the protection of their property. That's a very American ideal and a core fundamental right."</p> <p>It's a right that property owners across the west are increasingly willing to exercise.</p> <p>BURNT RANCH, CALIF. Nicholas Holliday Nicholas Holliday began building up his own fire defenses when he moved to Burnt Ranch in Northern California nine years ago to start a cannabis farm.</p> <p>Such defenses are common in the Emerald Triangle — Humboldt, Trinity and Mendocino Counties — where farmers began cultivating marijuana decades before legalization. Those early growers, ineligible for fire insurance, developed a culture of self-reliance and skepticism of government agencies.</p>

“Each year I’d grab at least another piece of equipment,” Mr. Holliday said, who has become one of the largest growers in Trinity County. “It’s not if your place is going to burn, it’s when.”

Last August, Mr. Holliday was ordered to evacuate as the Monument fire approached the region. But leaving would have meant forfeiting the entire season’s crop. Instead, using back roads to avoid evacuation checkpoints, he and a group of residents stayed.

They readied a converted box truck and a converted garbage truck, both retrofitted with 2,000 gallon tanks. They dug fire lines with a bulldozer, encircled their homes in hoses, and slept in shifts to monitor the fire. They maintained the routine for the nearly six weeks the evacuation order was in place.

Professional fire agencies strongly oppose this approach. “We’ve seen people who refused evacuation orders and warnings and then at the very last minute, when they realized they should have left, it puts firefighters in harm’s way,”

Mr. Schuler, of Cal Fire, said. “We try to go save them. Ultimately, it can cost them their lives or lives of firefighters.”

But Mr. Holliday sees it differently.

“I don’t know when we took responsibility off the ranchers and homeowners and put it on the Forest Service and the firefighters to save us,” he said. “No one is going to save you. I ain’t waiting for Prince Charming.”

TAYLORSVILLE, CALIF.

Cody Joe Pearce

As the Dixie fire moved through the Sierra Nevada, the tiny town of Taylorsville, some 250 miles east of Burnt Ranch, was put under evacuation orders three times within 60 days.

Determined not to leave his property, Cody Joe Pearce, a sixth-generation rancher, started an ad hoc community fire service using his own water tender.

“I’d burn to death before I ever left home,” he said.

At first, Mr. Pearce made his nightly rounds alone, spraying down structures to prevent them from burning. As the threat continued, he bought two more water trucks and recruited friends to help.

“Maybe I’m crazy,” he said, “but it just seemed like somebody had to do something, because nobody was here.”

Matt Sanders, a fire engine captain with the United States Forest Service, said he understood residents’ desperation to protect their properties but added that without training, doing so could be extremely risky.

“I don’t think that anybody who doesn’t have training should be out there fighting fire, for any reason,” said Mr. Sanders, who fought the Dixie fire in August. “Prevention goes a lot farther than protection,” he said.

As word of Mr. Pearce’s efforts spread, community members began to offer their own equipment for cheap, or even free — if he could get them running. A GoFundMe raised more than \$25,000 to help pay for fuel and repairs.

Mr. Pearce said he is committed to building up his arsenal for the coming years. “We’re going to try and get enough stuff built out, so if we have a fire around here we can go put it out and not have to wait on the agencies.”

BURNS, ORE.

Dale Martin

Dale and Patricia Martin formed what's known as a Rangeland Fire Protection Association in Silver Creek, Ore., in 2000. One hundred volunteer members serve the region — 780,000 acres of sagebrush and grassland that borders the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Southeastern Oregon.

"I just felt like the rural area needed something so we could get there more quickly than they could get out to us," said Mr. Martin, 84, who runs a country store and archery shop with his wife.

Silver Creek members pay \$50 to \$500 in annual dues, based on acreage. The funds go toward converting donated military equipment into firefighting machinery.

Marvin Vetter, the state of Oregon's coordinator for rangeland associations, said the volunteer model appeals to rural communities. "The people get to decide on the level of protection and the rate and who's responding or the training," he explained. "It's not the government telling them, 'Thou shalt do this.'"

The Silver Creek association's 19 trucks are stationed at landholders' homes across the region. Members receive wildfire training, protective gear and communications equipment. The goal is to dispatch trained local volunteers to contain fires until government agencies arrive. Mr. Martin estimates that they respond to about eight fires a year.

"I just want to see neighbors helping neighbors and people getting along and being helpful to each other," he said.

PALISADES, WASH.

Molly Linville

After the Sutherland fire burned through her ranch in 2017, Ms. Linville [lobbied](#) for legislation to recognize rangeland associations in her state. When the effort failed, she bought a fire truck for \$5,000.

"We don't have the luxury to wait for permission," she said.

Her ranch sits mostly on unprotected land, outside the jurisdiction of state or federal fire agencies.

Ms. Linville and her neighbors use a Facebook page to report smoke. She said they have stopped several fires from getting out of hand in the fast-fuel grassland plains.

"We know the land, and it makes all the sense in the world that we would be the ones fighting the fire out here," said Ms. Linville, who started her career for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and maintained her annual wildfire training for a decade.

Firefighters' unions have staunchly opposed Ms. Linville's efforts, arguing that letting citizens fight fire is dangerous.

LOS GATOS, CALIF.

Robert Seals

"In my firefighting history, this was called the 'Asbestos Forest.' We never came here," Robert Seals said, describing the region in Los Gatos where he moved after a five-decade career fighting fires. "And then three years ago it started."

Mr. Seals can tick through a list of close calls to his property, including the CZU Lightning Complex fire last year.

He worked his first fire at 17 — lying about his age to be hired. He went on to lead a team that specialized in felling large trees during fires in some of the most rugged terrain in the West.

He began building off-road vehicles to carry water through rough terrain. Through a contract with fire agencies, he would allow them to use his vehicles, and he would work the fires as well.

	<p>Now 76, he is building trucks again. But his vehicles sell mostly to individuals or communities looking for protection.</p> <p>He is a fierce proponent for personal fire defense. Fire Breakers, his company, consults on fire risks and clears shrubs, brush and other fuels surrounding homes.</p> <p>After decades working in wildfire prevention, Mr. Seals is deeply skeptical of fire agencies' approach.</p> <p>"All Cal Fire wants you to do is leave. That's why all they talk about is the to-go bag; I'm the to-stay bag," he said. "Yes, leave when you're told if you don't know what you're doing — but there is so much you can do before you leave."</p>
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HEADLINE	10/30 Russia: record number new infections
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/10/30/world/covid-vaccine-boosters#russia-sets-a-record-for-new-cases-as-it-starts-a-weeklong-holiday
GIST	<p>Russia announced a record number of new infections on Saturday ahead of a "nonworking week" that authorities hope will slow the spread of the coronavirus.</p> <p>Authorities reported 40,251 new infections in the preceding 24 hours, a record, and 1,160 deaths. More than 237,380 have died of Covid-19 so far, the largest rate in Europe.</p> <p>President Vladimir V. Putin has largely left it to regional governors to implement pandemic-related restrictions but has recently taken a more active role, ordering that all nonessential workers stay home from Oct. 30 until Nov. 7.</p> <p>Moscow, with 7,267 new infections in the past 24 hours, has been an epicenter of the pandemic. The city began a light lockdown two days earlier, on Oct. 28. Schools, kindergartens, nonessential shops, restaurants, bars and gyms are closed, while museums and theaters remain open at 50-percent capacity.</p> <p>As in other regions, the health care system is being put to the test.</p> <p>"Health care is working to its limits," Moscow's regional governor, Andrei Vorobiev, told the government network Channel One earlier in the week.</p> <p>He noted that more than 500 people were on ventilators, also a record number. He said that 80 percent of the 10,000 hospitalized Covid patients had not been vaccinated.</p> <p>Anna Popova, the head of Russia's consumer health watchdog, said the more contagious AY.4.2 strain of the Delta variant had been identified in the Moscow region.</p> <p>Only about one third of Russians are fully vaccinated, though the rates in Moscow are higher. Scholars attribute this to mistrust in the authorities and in vaccines. Authorities hope the restrictions will motivate more people to get the shots.</p> <p>Russia's statistics agency said Friday that 44,265 people died of Covid-19 or complications from it in September. The agency has registered more than 450,000 deaths in Russia, which has a population of 144 million. It is one of the highest death rates in Europe.</p> <p>Moscow's mayor, Sergei Sobyenin, has said he hopes that the city will reopen on Nov. 7, despite rumors swirling that the restrictions will be extended for several more weeks, or until the New Year. He has also introduced free express Covid-19 tests and announced stricter enforcement of a mask mandate on the Moscow Metro.</p>

	<p>The restrictions have polarized residents of the capital city. Travel agencies reported unusually high interest in package holidays for the week. Some residents complained about the fact that there is no system in place to allow vaccinated people to live normally and enter venues using QR codes as proof of vaccination, which could be an incentive to get the vaccine. Others complain that recent measures are too little, too late.</p> <p>“We needed to do this sooner, because the numbers are scary,” said Anna Zhurba, a 33-year-old museum employee. “Today, we have the highest number of new infections yet. How will one week improve the situation?”</p> <p>Institutions can decide independently to use QR codes, though there is no mandate. Ms. Zhurba said that when her museum announced a requirement to show a QR code upon entry, some responded by calling the restriction a “fascist way of dividing people.”</p>
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HEADLINE	10/29 Court declines to block Maine mandate
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/29/us/maine-coronavirus-vaccine.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Friday refused to block Maine’s requirement that health care workers be vaccinated against the coronavirus notwithstanding their religious objections.</p> <p>As is the court’s custom in rulings on emergency applications, its brief order gave no reasons.</p> <p>But the three most conservative members of the court — Justices Clarence Thomas, Samuel A. Alito Jr. and Neil M. Gorsuch — issued a lengthy dissent, saying the majority had gone badly astray.</p> <p>“Where many other states have adopted religious exemptions, Maine has charted a different course,” Justice Gorsuch wrote for the dissenting justices. “There, health care workers who have served on the front line of a pandemic for the last 18 months are now being fired and their practices shuttered. All for adhering to their constitutionally protected religious beliefs. Their plight is worthy of our attention.”</p> <p>The court had earlier rejected challenges to vaccination requirements at Indiana University and for personnel in New York City’s school system. Those rulings were issued by just one justice, which can be a sign that the legal questions involved were not considered substantial.</p> <p>But those earlier rulings did not involve religion. The court has in other settings been quite protective of religious practices, even when they seemed at odds with public health. It has, for instance, repeatedly blocked state shutdown orders that treated houses of worship less favorably than what the justices in the majority said were comparable secular activities.</p> <p>Friday’s ruling was, at least in that sense, something of a surprise.</p> <p>Justice Amy Coney Barrett, joined by Justice Brett M. Kavanaugh, filed a brief concurring opinion. She said the court should be wary of making momentous decisions “on a short fuse without benefit of full briefing and oral argument.”</p> <p>The concurrence seemed to have a dual purpose: of indicating that the two justices were not signaling how they would vote if the question reached the court in a more deliberate fashion and of cautioning litigants against the overuse of what critics call the court’s “shadow docket.”</p> <p>Maine has required health care workers to be vaccinated against various contagious diseases since 1989, and eliminated exemptions on religious or philosophical grounds under a state law enacted in 2019, before the coronavirus pandemic began. The state does exempt workers for whom the given vaccine would be “medically inadvisable” in the judgment of a health care professional.</p> <p>The 2019 law was the subject of a referendum, with about 73 percent of the state’s voters approving it.</p>

The state included a coronavirus vaccine among the required vaccinations in a regulation issued in August, setting a deadline of Oct. 29. Several health care workers sued, saying the requirement violated their constitutional right to the free exercise of religion.

Judge Jon D. Levy of the Federal District Court in Maine [ruled](#) against the plaintiffs.

“Both the serious risk of illness and death associated with the spread of the Covid-19 virus and the efforts by state and local governments to reduce that risk have burdened most aspects of modern life,” he wrote.

The plaintiffs’ “refusal to be vaccinated based on their religious beliefs has resulted or will result in real hardships as it relates to their jobs,” Judge Levy wrote. “They have not, however, been prevented from staying true to their professed religious beliefs which, they claim, compel them to refuse to be vaccinated against Covid-19.”

A unanimous three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit, in Boston, [affirmed Judge Levy’s ruling](#).

Judge Sandra L. Lynch, writing for the panel, said the regulation did not single out religion for disfavored treatment. In a 1990 decision, the Supreme Court ruled that neutral laws of general applicability that incidentally impose burdens on religion generally do not run afoul of the First Amendment’s protection of religious liberty. That decision, [Employment Division v. Smith](#), has been the subject of [harsh criticism](#) by the more conservative members of the Supreme Court.

The plaintiffs in the case from Maine said the state was an outlier in refusing to grant religious exemptions.

“Almost every other state,” [they told the justices](#), “has found a way to protect against the same virus without trampling religious liberty — including states that have smaller populations and much greater territory than Maine. If Vermont, New Hampshire, Alaska, the Dakotas, Montana, Wyoming, California and the District of Columbia can all find ways to both protect against Covid-19 and respect individual liberty, Maine can too.”

The plaintiffs also argued that the state’s regulation was not generally applicable because it allowed for medical exemptions. Judge Lynch rejected that argument, saying the medical exemption was in keeping with the goals the regulation meant to accomplish. “Providing health care workers with medically contraindicated vaccines would threaten the health of those workers and thus compromise both their own health and their ability to provide care,” she wrote.

In an [emergency application](#) urging the Supreme Court to intervene, lawyers for the workers wrote that “untold numbers of employees in Maine will have to decide, in a matter of days, what is more important to them — their deeply held religious beliefs or their ability to work anywhere in their state so that they can feed their families.”

Aaron M. Frey, Maine’s attorney general, [responded](#) that the plaintiffs “have not fairly stated their choices.”

“They remain free to decline vaccination in accordance with their religious beliefs,” Mr. Frey wrote, adding that they “can pursue employment elsewhere or may be transitioned to employment off site.”

Maine, he wrote, is “seeking to protect the health and lives of health care workers and patients across the state, and that interest far outweighs the harm, if any, that applicants may suffer.”

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SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/10/30/world/covid-vaccine-boosters#young-children-can-now-be-vaccinated-but-many-parents-are-still-reluctant-to-consent
GIST	<p>The Food and Drug Administration's authorization of a Covid-19 vaccine for ages 5 to 11 on Friday makes 28 million unvaccinated children in the United States suddenly eligible for the shot and offers the country an opportunity to make big inroads in its efforts to achieve broad immunity against the coronavirus.</p> <p>But in a nation that has already struggled mightily with public resistance to Covid vaccines, getting shots into those little arms may present health authorities with the toughest vaccination challenge yet.</p> <p>Even many parents who are themselves vaccinated and approved the shot for their teenagers are churning over whether to give consent for their younger children, questioning if the risk of the unknowns of a brand-new vaccine is worth it when most coronavirus cases in youngsters are mild.</p> <p>In announcing its authorization of a lower-dose shot made by Pfizer and BioNTech for the age group, the F.D.A. said clinical trial data showed the shot was safe and prompted strong immune responses in children. The most common side effects were fatigue, fever and headache.</p> <p>To date, nearly two million children age 5 to 11 have been infected with the virus and 8,300 have been hospitalized. A third of those hospitalized were admitted to intensive care units, and at least 170 have died.</p> <p>But a report this month from researchers at Northeastern, Harvard, Rutgers and Northwestern Universities found that parental concerns around the Covid vaccination had increased "significantly" from June through September. Chief among them, researchers said, were the newness of the vaccine, whether it has been sufficiently tested, efficacy, side effects and long-term health consequences.</p> <p>According to a survey released Thursday by Kaiser Family Foundation, scarcely one in three parents will permit their children in this newly eligible age group to be vaccinated immediately. Two-thirds were either reluctant or adamantly opposed. An Axios-Ipsos poll found that 42 percent of parents of these children said they were unlikely to have their children vaccinated.</p> <p>Dr. Cynthia Bader, a pediatrician in the Seattle area with an 8-year-old son, said that if her school district issued a vaccine mandate, she would clap her hands with joy but "then cringe at the idea of all the parents who will be coming to me seeking counseling for vaccine exemption forms."</p>
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HEADLINE	10/29 Cargo containers wash up Vancouver Island
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/debris-shipping-containers-wash-up-on-vancouver-island
GIST	<p>VANCOUVER ISLAND, British Columbia. - Four of the more than 100 missing containers that fell off a vessel near the Strait of Juan de Fuca last week have been found washed up on remote parts of Vancouver Island.</p> <p>The Canadian Coast Guard says the four containers washed up on Cape Scott Provincial Park on the northwest tip of Vancouver Island. They described the area as "remote and rugged."</p> <p>The Coast Guard says a total of 109 containers fell off the vessel after rough seas and a fire on board. Two of the lost containers contain hazardous materials.</p> <p>CTV News Vancouver Island reports a school group went to Cape Scott and found a beach littered with cargo from the Zim Kingston container ship including refrigerators, toys, board games, and yoga mats.</p> <p>The container ship is currently anchored off Victoria, British Columbia. The owner of the vessel has contracted a company to recover the containers. CTV Canada reports that the contract will likely include cleaning up debris from the containers that have washed ashore.</p>

	Due to the hazardous contents of some of the containers, the public is advised to avoid opening or moving them and call 1-800-889-8852.
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HEADLINE	10/29 FBI: Covid killed 4X more cops than guns
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/fbi-nearly-4-times-as-many-police-officers-have-died-from-covid-19-as-guns-in-2021
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON - Amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation shows nearly four times as many law enforcement officers have died as a result of contracting the coronavirus in the line of duty than from guns in the first nine months of 2021.</p> <p>According to the FBI's data, there were 279 line-of-duty deaths within the first nine months of 2021, with 169 of those deaths from COVID-19 alone. Gunfire claimed the lives of 43 officers through September, according to the FBI.</p> <p>The numbers were provided by the FBI and showed a graphic representation of the data regarding line-of-duty deaths, both felonious and accidental, collected from law enforcement agencies across the United States and U.S. territories by the FBI's Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted Program.</p> <p>This preliminary information is published annually in the Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted publication.</p> <p>Although not represented in the graphic, the FBI wrote, "183 officers have died from the following medical conditions: 169 law enforcement officers died in the line of duty from illnesses related to COVID-19, 12 officers died due to heart attacks, 1 officer died due to other natural causes, and 1 officer died from conditions associated with responding to the terrorist attacks of 9/11."</p> <p>While the data by the FBI represents COVID-19 as the leading cause of death among police officers between January and September of 2021, members of law enforcement were among the first to be eligible to receive the vaccine. Yet many police officers across the nation still refuse to get vaccinated.</p> <p>Recently, the Chicago police union threatened to file a temporary restraining order to stop the city's COVID-19 vaccination mandate for city employees. More than 100 city workers are suing the city and state claiming the vaccination mandates they've been ordered to follow are unconstitutional.</p> <p>During a protest earlier this week, a mother of a Chicago police officer carried a poster with her son's picture and said he turned in his badge rather than getting the shot. "It's so unfair. My son did a wonderful job all these years and for them to do this to him, it's uncalled for," said Donna Felmon.</p> <p>Last month, the Los Angeles Times reported that 2,600 Los Angeles Police Department employees said they intended to seek religious exemptions and 350 planned to seek medical exemptions to the mandate that all city employees get vaccinated.</p> <p>Earlier this month, LA County Sheriff Alex Villanueva announced he would refuse to enforce Los Angeles County's vaccine mandate — an order that went into effect Oct. 1 requiring all county employees to get vaccinated against COVID-19 or tested regularly — or lose their jobs.</p> <p>With the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, which has almost 10,000 sworn deputies, about 50% of them are still unvaccinated, according to FOX 11 Los Angeles.</p> <p>In the meantime, the deadline has come and passed for the vaccination for some 100,000 county employees to get vaccinated. Nothing has happened to those who haven't gotten their shot other than a letter.</p>

	<p>On Monday, Knox County Sheriff Tom Spangler echoed a similar tone, writing a letter to President Joe Biden saying he will not comply with the President's executive order that all businesses with 100 or more employees have to require the COVID-19 vaccine as a condition of employment or have unvaccinated employees take COVID-19 tests weekly.</p> <p>The Knoxville, Tennessee sheriff said if he is required to enforce the mandate he could lose a "large majority" of his workforce, putting "the lives of Knox County citizens at risk."</p> <p>"It is my hope that more community leaders stand against this unconstitutional mandate," Spangler continued in his letter to the president.</p> <p>The standoffs are playing out at a time when police departments nationwide have been experiencing staffing shortages unrelated to the vaccine.</p> <p>Seattle's police department sent detectives and non-patrol officers to emergency calls last week because of a shortage of patrol officers that union leaders fear will become worse because of vaccine mandates.</p> <p>Cities and police leaders are now weighing the risk of losing more officers to resignations, firings or suspensions over their refusal to get vaccinated.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the number of Americans getting vaccinated has steadily increased over the past three months as boosters have become available and more mandates have taken effect.</p> <p>No national statistics show the vaccination rate for America's first responders, but individual police and fire departments across the country have reported figures far below the national rate of 77% for adults who have had at least one dose.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/29 Unions sue Port Seattle over mandate
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/unions-sue-port-of-seattle-over-vaccine-mandate-citing-lack-of-authority-and-collective-bargaining-efforts/
GIST	<p>Two unions representing workers at the Port of Seattle have sued the Port over its mandate requiring all employees to be fully vaccinated by Nov. 15. A hearing is scheduled for Nov. 12.</p> <p>The lawsuit was filed earlier this week by the International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 117 and 763 in King County Superior Court, with a motion for a preliminary injunction.</p> <p>The unions argue that the executive director of the Port of Seattle, who enacted the mandate, does not have the authority to do so, and that such decisions are to be bargained.</p> <p>"We respect and value Port staff for their professionalism and commitment to protecting the public," the Port said in a statement to The Seattle Times. "The spread of the virus affects our ability to maintain safe operations, our ability to provide essential services to our region, and the well-being of our families. Getting vaccinated is the most important action Port employees can take to prevent illness or reduce the severity of illness."</p> <p>In September, state troopers, ferry workers, and corrections officers filed a temporary injunction to halt Gov. Jay Inslee's vaccine mandate for all state workers, which required full vaccination by Oct. 18. Last week, a Thurston County Superior Court judge denied the motion. That lawsuit has no connection to the new case against Port of Seattle.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/30 Seattle hiring bonuses: SPD, 911 dispatch
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SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/seattle-to-offer-hiring-bonuses-of-up-to-25k-to-attract-more-police-officers-911-dispatchers/
GIST	<p>As hundreds of unvaccinated city employees are placed on leave or facing termination, the city of Seattle will start offering hiring bonuses to Seattle Police Department and 911 dispatch hires to address “critical ongoing staffing challenges,” Mayor Jenny Durkan’s office said late Friday.</p> <p>Durkan announced an emergency order that would provide hiring bonuses of up to \$25,000 for laterally hired and \$10,000 for newly hired officers and staff to the SPD and the Community Safety and Communications Center.</p> <p>“When residents call 911, they expect an officer to show up — and when they call the 911 emergency line, they expect that someone will answer the phone,” Durkan said in a news release. “Hiring, recruiting and training takes months, and we need to act now to ensure we can have trained and deployable staff. Seattle cannot keep waiting to address the real public safety officer hiring and retention crisis we are experiencing in Seattle right now.”</p> <p>Staffing in the city and nationwide had been strained by the pandemic, but took a further hit in Seattle last week when several hundred medically or religiously exempted employees were put on leave to await potential accommodations after Durkan’s citywide COVID-19 vaccine mandate went into effect.</p> <p>Among those on leave were more than 170 first responders from SPD and the Seattle Fire Department.</p> <p>Mike Solan, president of the Seattle Police Officers Guild, said Tuesday that SPD’s understaffing problem is less a product of the pandemic, and due instead to a lack of political support for police from the city, which he says began in the wake of protests surrounding the murder of George Floyd last year, and is highlighted by the recent vaccine mandate.</p> <p>“The defunding narrative and the lack of political support has led hundreds of police officers to leave this city,” Solan said, noting that the department is under an emergency staffing procedure. “We’re already at a staffing crisis and then the mayor decides it’s a good idea to enact a mandate. And now since that mandate, we have 100 more officers not working the street.”</p> <p>Solan said late Friday that the union would issue a statement in response to Durkan’s order on Saturday.</p> <p>According to the mayor’s office, more than 250 officers have left the SPD in the last two years, causing slower response times and reducing the department’s capacity by over 300,000 service hours.</p> <p>According to Durkan, the decision to award hiring incentives came after the Seattle City Council did not consider the mayor’s proposed ordinance in July, which would have restored funding to the Seattle Police Department and reinstated 2019 council-approved hiring incentives for the department.</p> <p>Seattle Police Chief Adrian Diaz and Interim Director of the CSCC Chris Lombard endorsed the emergency order on Friday.</p> <p>“Hiring is a challenge for every law enforcement agency right now, and most are offering incentives to attract new members,” Diaz said in the release. “These new hiring bonuses will level the competitive playing field and will allow the SPD to attract the highest caliber employees we need to protect and serve all people of Seattle.”</p>
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HEADLINE	10/30 Data: job openings twisted by Covid
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/economy/latest-data-on-job-openings-in-washington-shows-a-labor-market-still-twisted-by-covid/
GIST	New labor data from September highlights how out of whack Washington state’s jobs market has become after 19 months of pandemic.

In industries such as health care and tech, demand for workers continues to outstrip supply. In others, such as manufacturing and food service, the number of available workers still dwarfs the number of job openings.

These imbalances show up starkly in data on online jobs postings, which the Employment Security Department (ESD) gathers each month to monitor job demand.

Not surprisingly, the employer in Washington with the most job listings posted online June through September was Amazon, with 31,740, or nearly nine times as many as second-place Microsoft. Amazon was also the biggest June-through-September jobs poster in 2020, and the second biggest in 2019.

Amazon's high ranking illustrates the surge in demand during the pandemic for online shopping (many of Amazon's postings are for warehouse jobs, which the company is adding at a dizzying pace). But it also gets at the way the broader demand for workers in tech, the ultimate work-from-home industry, never really paused during the pandemic, even as other industries, such as manufacturing and restaurants, went down.

Boeing, for example, had just 1,457 June-through-September online job postings, which may reflect the aerospace giant's struggles since the collapse of global travel and the backlash from two MAX 737 crashes. Boeing's recent postings were enough for a No. 8 ranking on ESD's September list. But it was still fewer than the 1,729 job openings Boeing posted June through September in 2019. (A year before that, with jet production ramping up, Boeing advertised 3,349 jobs in the same period.)

Another finding from the pandemic jobs market: Health care remains largely recession-proof. From June through September in 2019 and 2020, six of the top 15 job posters in Washington were health care organizations; in 2021, health care accounted for four of the top 15; five if you count the state health department.

Speaking of government jobs: Back in 2019, the state itself was the third-largest June-through-September job poster, with 8,592 listings, behind only Providence Health & Services and Amazon. But in 2020, the state didn't even crack the top 25 job posters, and in 2021, it made the list, at No. 9, only because of jobs posted by the state health department.

Those job market disparities are more clearly spelled out in ESD's [supply-demand report](#) for September. The report compares the number of new and ongoing job postings in each industry against the number of that industry's unemployment claims, which serves as a rough index of the local labor supply.

According to September data, demand for health care practitioners and technicians outweighed supply nearly 6 to 1. For computer- and mathematical-related jobs, demand beat supply nearly 4 to 1. Demand was also ahead of supply for sales-related jobs and for workers in community and social service.

By contrast, worker supply was well ahead of demand for a range of industries.

Open jobs for metal workers and plastic workers, a category covering aerospace machinists, were dwarfed nearly 4 to 1 by the supply of available workers. Open cooking and serving jobs were outnumbered by available workers by around 2 to 1. In construction, open jobs were exceeded by available workers by nearly 6 to 1.

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HEADLINE	10/29 Less workers quit in WA than elsewhere
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/economy/i-quit-is-heard-less-often-in-washington-state-than-in-most-of-america-but-its-not-clear-why/

GIST

Employers in Washington have struggled to find enough workers — but it could have been worse: Washingtonians were far less likely to quit than was the case in nearly any other state, new federal data shows.

Just 82,000 Washington workers, or 2.4% of the state's workforce, left their jobs in August, according to a [report](#) from the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics.

That's a "quit rate" well below the August national average of 2.9% and lower than all but three other states — New York (2.2%), Connecticut (2.2%) and Pennsylvania (2.1%) — and Washington, D.C. (1.7%).

Washington's July quit rate was also 2.4%, which was below the national average (2.7%) and lower than all but five states and Washington, D.C.

Part of Washington's advantage could be the state's relatively high wages, including the nation's highest minimum wage: \$13.69/hour. Connecticut also has a high minimum wage: \$13. By contrast, the states with the three highest August quit rates — Kentucky (4.5%), Georgia (4.2%) and Idaho (4.1%) — also have very low minimum wages: Kentucky and Idaho both pay the federal minimum of \$7.25, while Georgia allows \$5.15 (though most workers get at least \$7.25.)

Washington workers also enjoy other worker-friendly regulations, including laws on scheduling changes (in Seattle) and paid family leave statewide; some other states with progressive workplace regulation also boasted low August quit rates, including Connecticut, New York and the District of Columbia, says Jacob Vigdor, an economist at the University of Washington Evans School of Public Policy and Governance.

"In the midst of a labor shortage, any worker dissatisfied with their current job has a very good chance of finding something better — better pay, better benefits, better working conditions — if they look around," Vigdor says. "From this perspective, it would make sense that states with stricter labor market regulations have lower quit rates."

But there are plenty of exceptions. Colorado has a minimum wage of \$12.32 and a quit rate of 3.4%. Pennsylvania, with its 2.1% quit rate, has a minimum of \$7.25. Illinois, which is also known as labor-friendly, had a quit rate of 3.5%.

Another factor — stricter COVID regulations and more widespread vaccination — could also be helping keep workers on the job, especially in public-facing positions with a high risk of exposure.

States with August quit rates of 2.4% or lower have vaccination rates of 60% or higher, as does Washington, D.C. Conversely, many states with high quit rates also have relatively low vaccination rates. That goes for many red states, such as Georgia, with a 48% vaccination rate, and Idaho (just under 50%), but also for blue Illinois, which has an August quit rate of 3.5% and a current vaccination rate of around 54%.

Vigdor speculates that workplace regulations, wages and COVID-related policy may be influencing quit rates in complex ways — including ways that don't fit neatly with conventional COVID narratives.

"It may be the case that the states with high COVID case counts in August had high quit rates not because COVID causes people to quit their jobs," Vigdor says, "but because the lack of mask restrictions, vaccination requirements, and other COVID-related regulations causes both greater economic activity, which means more job openings out there, and higher transmission rates."

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HEADLINE 10/29 Jury: \$17.3M to immigrants in detention

SOURCE <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/jury-awards-17-3-million-to-immigrants-held-in-washington-state-for-work-performed-in-detention-center/>

GIST

A jury Friday awarded nearly \$17.3 million to immigrants held since 2014 at a detention center in Tacoma who had been denied minimum wage while working for \$1 a day, according to a lawyer representing detainees in a federal lawsuit.

The jury award in that lawsuit comes two days after the same jury found Florida-based The GEO Group, which runs the for-profit facility, violated Washington's minimum wage law, in a precedent-setting decision.

GEO may have to pay even more when a judge considers separate damages sought by state Attorney General Bob Ferguson, who had filed another lawsuit on behalf of detainees held since 2005. The two suits were consolidated for the first phase of a trial, determining whether GEO was obligated to pay minimum wage.

Adam Berger, one of the attorneys representing detainees in the private lawsuit, said he and his colleagues had asked for \$13.7 million, but the jury decided the immigrants were owed more.

If GEO appeals, no money will be distributed until that is resolved, Berger said.

"Immigrants held in GEO's for-profit facilities are not criminals and should not be beholden to enriching the corporation's bottom line," Berger said in a statement.

"My heart is filled with joy," added plaintiff Goodluck Nwauzor in the statement. During his eight-month detainment, Nwauzor cleaned showers for \$1 a day, the statement said. He was granted asylum in 2017 and lawful permanent residency in 2018.

Other detainees did laundry, worked in the kitchen or cleaned other parts of the facility, now known as the Northwest ICE Processing Center. GEO relied on a captive workforce rather than hiring local people it would have had to pay more, plaintiffs charged.

GEO did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The award is to be divided among 10,000 people who were held at the facility.

"The trick is going to be locating some of these people," Berger said in an interview. Some may have been deported or otherwise left the country. Others may just be hard to track down, given how long ago it was they were held at the detention center.

"But we are going to engage in an extensive outreach," Berger said.

U.S. District Judge Robert Bryan will hear arguments related to the state's request for an award Monday, according to Berger.

GEO had argued that Washington's minimum wage act didn't apply to detainees, and pointed out that the state doesn't pay its prisoners the minimum wage, now \$13.69 an hour. The law says residents of "a state, county, or municipal" detention facility are not entitled to minimum wage for work they perform.

Lawyers for the state and plaintiffs said the detention center didn't fit that exemption because it's a private, for-profit facility, not a "state, county or municipal" one.

Washington appears to be the only state to have sued a private detention contractor for not paying minimum wage to immigration detainees. Similar lawsuits have been brought on behalf of immigration detainees in other states, including New Mexico, Colorado and California, seeking to force GEO and another major private detention company, CoreCivic, to pay minimum wage to detainees there.

[Return to Top](#)**HEADLINE****10/29 Pierce Co. sheriff on credibility issue list**

SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article255398601.html
GIST	<p>Prosecutors decided Friday there is potential impeachment information against Pierce County Sheriff Ed Troyer and added him to a list of people with credibility issues.</p> <p>The list is maintained by the Pierce County Prosecutor's Office, which is required to turn over information on Troyer to defense attorneys should he be called as a witness or expert.</p> <p>A judge makes a case-by-case ruling whether that information should be introduced at trial. A 10-person committee chaired by chief criminal deputy Jim Schacht made the decision at its regularly scheduled meeting.</p> <p>A letter was sent to Troyer informing him of the action and offering him a chance to review his file and respond.</p> <p>John Sheeran, a Tacoma attorney representing Troyer, said he understands the Prosecutor's Office has a certain procedure they have to go through.</p> <p>"We're disappointed that they reached this conclusion, but we're confident that when all of the facts come to light, that decision will be reversed," Sheeran said.</p> <p>Earlier this month, the Washington State Attorney General's Office charged Troyer with false reporting and making a false or misleading statement to a public servant. Both charges are misdemeanors, and a conviction could carry a penalty of up to a year in jail and up to a \$5,000 fine.</p> <p>A not guilty plea was entered on his behalf Thursday in Pierce County District Court.</p> <p>The AG's Office alleges Troyer lied to an emergency dispatcher when he said Sedrick Altheimer, a 24-year-old Black newspaper carrier, threatened to kill him during a Jan. 27 confrontation near the sheriff's Tacoma house.</p> <p>That "officer needs help" call prompted a massive response, starting 42 law enforcement officers to the scene. Fourteen officers and deputies actually responded.</p> <p>In a recording of Troyer's conversation with the dispatcher, the sheriff repeatedly says Altheimer threatened him.</p> <p>A Tacoma officer who spoke with Troyer at the scene said the sheriff denied being threatened by the newspaper carrier and said he never saw Altheimer with a weapon.</p> <p>Troyer has denied wrongdoing and chalked the incident up to a misunderstanding.</p> <p>Days after Troyer was criminally charged, an investigator hired by the County Council released a report saying the sheriff broke four department policies on conduct, community engagement, bias and off-duty intervention.</p> <p>The position of sheriff is independently elected and the council has no supervisory authority over Troyer, who was elected in November.</p> <p>There are 111 people currently on the "potential impeachment recurring witness list." Not all of them are law enforcement officers, and some have retired or moved out of the area. Prosecutors can remove people from the list if they determine there are no credibility issues.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/29 DOH: 725,435 cases, 8628 deaths
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/coronavirus/article255398861.html

GIST	<p>The Washington state Department of Health reported 2,598 new COVID-19 cases and 43 deaths Friday.</p> <p>As of Friday, statewide totals from the illness caused by the coronavirus are 725,435 and 8,628 deaths. The case total includes 85,290 infections listed as probable. Death data is considered complete only through Oct. 11. DOH revises previous case and death counts daily.</p>
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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	10/31 China's personal data protection law
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/chinas-personal-data-protection-law-kicks-in-today/
GIST	<p>China's Personal Information Protection Law (PIPL) is now in force, laying out ground rules around how data is collected, used, and stored. It also outlines data processing requirements for companies based outside of China, including passing a security assessment conducted by state authorities.</p> <p>Multinational corporations (MNCs) that move personal information out of the country also will have to obtain certification on data protection from professional institutions, according to the PIPL.</p> <p>The legislation was passed in August, after it went through a couple of revisions since it was first pitched in October last year. Effective from November 1, the new law was necessary to address the "chaos" data had created, with online platforms over-collecting personal data, the Chinese government then said.</p> <p>Personal information is defined as all types of data recorded either electronically or other forms, which relates to identified or identifiable persons. It does not include anonymised data.</p> <p>The PIPL also applies to foreign organisations that process personal data overseas for the purpose of, amongst others, providing products and services to Chinese consumers as well as analysing the behaviours of Chinese consumers. They also will have to establish designated agencies or appoint representatives based in China to assume responsibility for matters related to the protection of personal data.</p> <p>The new legislation encompasses a chapter that applies specifically to cross-border data transfers, stating that companies that need to move personal information out of China must first conduct "personal information protection impact assessments", according to Hong Kong's Office of the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data (PCPD).</p> <p>They also will need to obtain separate consent from individuals pertaining to the transfer of their personal information and meet one of several requirements. These include agreeing to a "standard contract" issued by authorities overseeing cyberspace matters and fulfilling requirements outlined in other laws and regulations established by the authorities, the PCPD said.</p> <p>These MNCs also would have to implement necessary measures to ensure other foreign parties involved in processing the data adhere to data security standards stipulated by the PIPL.</p> <p>UNCLEAR WHAT SECURITY ASSESSMENTS ENTAIL</p> <p>Leo Xin, senior associate with law firm Pinsent Masons, described the legislation as a "milestone" in China's data protection legal regime and urged MNCs to pay special attention to the rules on cross-border data transfers.</p> <p>Leo said in a post: "There are still certain areas that remain unclear and require detailed implementation rules, such as how the security assessment should be handled, what the model clauses for data transfer formulated by the China Cyberspace Administration look like, what the approval procedure shall be [if] there is request for personal information by overseas judicial organs or law enforcement agencies."</p>

The legislation further called for the handling of personal data to be clear, reasonable, and limited to the "minimum scope necessary" to achieve their objectives of processing the information.

The lawyer recommended that MNCs begin evaluating the potential impact of PIPL on their IT infrastructure and data processing activities.

According to the PCPD, the new legislation also encompasses "automated decision-making" data processing, in which IT systems are used to automatically analyse and make decisions about consumer behaviours as well as consumers' habits, interests, financial, and health.

Here, companies will have to ensure such decision-making processes are transparent and fair. Consumers also must be provided with the option to opt out of receiving personalised content. Security impact assessments must be carried out and these reports retained for at least three years.

Companies that breach PIPL rules may be issued an order for rectification or warnings. Chinese authorities also may confiscate any "unlawful income", according to the PCPD.

Violators that fail to comply with orders to rectify the breach will face fines of up to 1 million yuan (\$150,000), while the person responsible for ensuring compliance can be fined between 10,000 yuan (\$1,500) and 100,000 yuan (\$15,000).

For "serious" cases, Chinese authorities also dish out fines of up to 50 million yuan (\$7.5 million) or 5% of the company's annual turnover for the previous fiscal year. In addition, its business operations may be suspended or business permits and licences revoked.

The Beijing administration last month [told local media](#) it would take "targeted measures" to address problems it deemed to persist within the digital economy, such as poor data management. According to *South China Morning Post*, the Ministry of Industry and IT was pushing ahead with its scrutiny of the internet sector as part of a six-month campaign that began in July.

The ministry recently instructed 43 apps to make rectifications after they were found to have illegally transferred user data.

The Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) in July ordered Chinese ride-sharing platform [Didi to remove its app](#) from local app stores, after it breached regulations governing the collection and use of personal data. Did was instructed to rectify "existing problems" and "effectively protect" users' personal data.

In May, the CAC [called out 33 mobile apps for collecting more user data](#) than it deemed necessary to offer their service. These companies, which included Baidu and Tencent Holdings, also were told to plug the gaps.

[Tencent said](#) last month said it was forming a committee to assess its user data protection and privacy policies. This team would comprise technical, legal, and media professionals as well as members of the public, the Chinese tech giant said. The committee will make recommendations on improvements, if and where necessary, to better safeguard user privacy, the company added.

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HEADLINE	10/31 Huawei revenue continues downward trend
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/huawei-revenue-continues-downward-trend-as-three-quarter-total-smashed-by-one-third/
GIST	Huawei released a snippet reporting its three-quarter revenue total on Friday, and it showed the Chinese giant is continuing to get hammered in the consumer segment.

In its first quarter, sales were [down 16.5%](#); by the half-year, the [revenue drop](#) was 29%; and for the nine months of its fiscal year, Huawei reported taking in 456 billion yuan in revenue.

This represents an almost 33% drop on the 671 billion yuan reported last year.

"Overall performance was in line with forecast," Huawei rotating chair Guo Ping said. "While our B2C business has been significantly impacted, our B2B businesses remain stable."

Huawei did not break out its quarterly revenue explicitly nor provide a breakdown of its business units, but it had 152 billion yuan for Q1, Q2 was around 168 billion yuan, and Q3 was in the realm of 136 billion yuan.

For the half-year, Huawei said in August its carrier business was down 14% to 137 billion yuan and consumer declined 13.7% from 221 billion yuan to 136 billion yuan, while enterprise increased 18% to 36 billion yuan.

Last November, Huawei sold off its [Honor brand](#) due to US restrictions.

In May, Huawei reported [revenue almost halved](#) in its Australian arm during 2020, and it had shed 113 employees.

During September, the US Justice Department and Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou cut a deal to [end an extradition lawsuit](#) that ran for nearly three years.

Meng admitted only to misleading global financial institutions and did not plead guilty to the various fraud charges imposed against her.

Without even trying to hide its hostage diplomacy tactics, Beijing subsequently released [two Canadians](#) who were detained shortly after Meng's arrest and kept in Chinese prisons.

By contrast, Meng was able to live under house arrest in one of her two Vancouver homes.

The US Federal Communications Commission laid out in September the rules for small carriers that are applying to access a pot of \$1.9 billion to [rip out and replace Huawei and ZTE](#) network equipment and services.

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HEADLINE	10/31 Signal release details of search warrant
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/signal-unveils-how-far-us-law-enforcement-will-go-to-get-information-about-people/
GIST	<p>Signal has released the details of a search warrant it received from police in Santa Clara, California, unveiling the efforts US law enforcement authorities will undertake to force online platforms into disclosing the personal information of their users.</p> <p>In the search warrant, Santa Clara Police sought to get the name, street address, telephone number, and email address of a specific Signal user. It also wanted billing records, the dates of when the account was opened and registered, inbound and outbound call detail records, voicemails, video calls, emails, text messages, IP addresses along with dates and times for each login, and even all dates and times the user connected to Signal.</p> <p>In response to the search warrant, Signal provided law enforcement authorities with timestamps regarding the account specified in the search warrant. The timestamps showed the dates that the account last connected to Signal.</p> <p>Signal said in a blog post that, by default, it does not collect the requested information from users.</p>

"As usual, we couldn't provide any of that. It's impossible to turn over data that we never had access to in the first place. Signal doesn't have access to your messages; your chat list; your groups; your contacts; your stickers; your profile name or avatar; or even the GIFs you search for," Signal wrote in the blog post.

The company's interaction with Santa Clara County police didn't end there, however, as the law enforcement authorities then issued a non-disclosure order that required Signal to not publicly disclose that it received the search warrant.

The non-disclosure order was then extended four times, which resulted in Signal's request to unseal the search warrant being repeatedly pushed back. In total, it took Signal almost a full year before the company was able to legally publicly disclose the process it underwent when it received the search warrant.

"Though the judge approved four consecutive non-disclosure orders, the court never acknowledged receipt of our motion to partially unseal, nor scheduled a hearing, and would not return counsel's phone calls seeking to schedule a hearing," Signal wrote.

Law enforcement authorities around the world are increasingly finding ways to compel online platforms to hand over information about their users. Just last month, hosted email service provider ProtonMail [publicly disclosed](#) that French authorities were able to acquire the IP address of one of its users through getting approval from Swiss courts. This was despite ProtonMail not being subject to French or EU requests, and only being required to comply with requests from Swiss authorities.

In response to the order, ProtonMail CEO and founder Andy Yen said all companies have to comply with laws, such as court orders, if they operate within 15 miles of land.

"No matter what service you use, unless it is based 15 miles offshore in international waters, the company will have to comply with the law," Yen said at the time.

Democracy advocate Freedom House last month also published findings that indicate a [growing number of governments](#) are forcing tech businesses to comply with online censorship and surveillance. Freedom House said in the past year alone, 48 out of 70 countries covered in its research -- which accounted for 88% of the world's internet users -- have pursued new rules for tech companies on content, data, or competition over the past year.

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HEADLINE	10/29 Microsoft: new 'Shrootless' bug macOS
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2021/10/new-shrootless-bug-could-let-attackers.html
GIST	<p>Microsoft on Thursday disclosed details of a new vulnerability that could allow an attacker to bypass security restrictions in macOS and take complete control of the device to perform arbitrary operations on the device without getting flagged by traditional security solutions.</p> <p>Dubbed "Shrootless" and tracked as CVE-2021-30892, the "vulnerability lies in how Apple-signed packages with post-install scripts are installed," Microsoft 365 Defender Research Team's Jonathan Bar Or said in a technical write-up. "A malicious actor could create a specially crafted file that would hijack the installation process."</p> <p>System Integrity Protection (SIP) aka "rootless" is a security feature introduced in OS X El Capitan that's designed to protect the macOS operating system by restricting a root user from executing unauthorized code or performing operations that may compromise system integrity.</p> <p>Specifically, SIP allows modification of protected parts of the system — such as /System, /usr, /bin, /sbin, and /var — only by processes that are signed by Apple or those that have special entitlements to write to system files, like Apple software updates and Apple installers, while also automatically authorizing apps that are downloaded from the Mac App Store.</p>

	<p>Microsoft's investigation into the security technology looked at macOS processes entitled to bypass SIP protections, leading to the discovery of a software installation daemon called "system_installd" that enables any of its child processes to completely circumvent SIP filesystem restrictions.</p> <p>Thus when an Apple-signed package is being installed, it invokes the system_installd daemon, which, in turn, executes any post-install scripts contained in the package by invoking a default shell, which is Z shell (zsh) on macOS.</p> <p>"Interestingly, when zsh starts, it looks for the file /etc/zshenv, and — if found — runs commands from that file automatically, even in non-interactive mode," Bar Or said. "Therefore, for attackers to perform arbitrary operations on the device, a fully reliable path they could take would be to create a malicious /etc/zshenv file and then wait for system_installd to invoke zsh."</p> <p>Successful exploitation of CVE-2021-30892 could enable a malicious application to modify protected parts of the file system, including the capability to install malicious kernel drivers (aka rootkits), overwrite system files, or install persistent, undetectable malware. Apple said it remediated the problem with additional restrictions as part of security updates pushed on October 26, 2021.</p> <p>"Security technology like SIP in macOS devices serves both as the device's built-in baseline protection and the last line of defense against malware and other cybersecurity threats," Bar Or said.</p> <p>"Unfortunately, malicious actors continue to find innovative ways of breaching these barriers for these very same reasons."</p>
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HEADLINE	10/29 New Android malware root smartphones
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2021/10/this-new-android-malware-can-gain-root.html
GIST	<p>An unidentified threat actor has been linked to a new Android malware strain that features the ability to root smartphones and take complete control over infected smartphones while simultaneously taking steps to evade detection.</p> <p>The malware has been named "AbstractEmu" owing to its use of code abstraction and anti-emulation checks undertaken to thwart analysis right from the moment the apps are opened. Notably, the global mobile campaign is engineered to target and infect as many devices as possible indiscriminately.</p> <p>Lookout Threat Labs said it found a total of 19 Android applications that posed as utility apps and system tools like password managers, money managers, app launchers, and data saving apps, seven of which contained the rooting functionality. Only one of the rogue apps, called Lite Launcher, made its way to the official Google Play Store, attracting a total of 10,000 downloads before it was purged.</p> <p>The apps are said to have been prominently distributed via third-party stores such as the Amazon Appstore and the Samsung Galaxy Store, as well as other lesser-known marketplaces like Aptoide and APKPure.</p> <p>"While rare, rooting malware is very dangerous. By using the rooting process to gain privileged access to the Android operating system, the threat actor can silently grant themselves dangerous permissions or install additional malware — steps that would normally require user interaction," Lookout researchers said. "Elevated privileges also give the malware access to other apps' sensitive data, something not possible under normal circumstances."</p> <p>Once installed, the attack chain is designed to leverage one of five exploits for older Android security flaws that would allow it to gain root permissions and take over the device, extract sensitive data, and transmit to a remote attack-controlled server —</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CVE-2015-3636 (PongPongRoot) • CVE-2015-1805 (iovyroot) • CVE-2019-2215 (Qu1ckr00t) • CVE-2020-0041, and

- [CVE-2020-0069](#)

Lookout attributed the mass distributed rooting malware campaign to a "well-resourced group with financial motivation," with telemetry data revealing that Android device users in the U.S. were the most impacted. The ultimate objective of the infiltrations remains unclear as yet.

"Rooting Android or jailbreaking iOS devices are still the most invasive ways to fully compromise a mobile device," the researchers said, adding "mobile devices are perfect tools for cyber criminals to exploit, as they have countless functionalities and hold an immense amount of sensitive data."

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HEADLINE	10/29 Hackers shift to Microsoft 365 cloud
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/cloud-security/masses-that-shifted-to-cloud-left-vulnerable-as-threat-groups-move-laterally-in-microsoft-365
GIST	<p>Mandiant on Friday reported that its researchers had recently observed UNC2452 – the group responsible for the SolarWinds attack – and other threat actors moving laterally to the Microsoft 365 cloud.</p> <p>Security researchers say these groups are largely funded by nation-states and their primary purpose is gathering intellectual property and intelligence primarily valuable to governments.</p> <p>In a blog post, the researchers said the threat actors are using Microsoft Exchange Web Services (EWS) impersonation to maintain persistent access to mailboxes in victim environments. The researchers said once the threat actors have access, it's hard to detect and the threat actor can control every mailbox in a victim's tenant.</p> <p>"Mandiant has also observed targeted threat actors abusing the trust relationships between cloud service provider organizations and their customers to laterally move from service providers to their downstream customers and gain administrator privileges in the target tenants," according to Mandiant researchers.</p> <p>Mandiant has updated its blog post, a white paper and an Azure AD Investigator tool to reflect the latest findings by its researchers.</p> <p>This year's Microsoft Exchange vulnerabilities likely caused more organizations to move to the cloud, already a trend that's been well underway for years, said Sean Nikkel, senior cyber threat intelligence analyst at Digital Shadows. Nikkel said this means that there are probably many Microsoft 365, Azure, or similar cloud services that were hastily deployed or otherwise incorrectly configured, which gives attackers a way in.</p> <p>Nikkel said user access management becomes crucial in this instance. He said Organizations should audit accounts regularly to ensure the correct privileges are assigned while also ensuring that newly created accounts are legitimate and old or unused accounts are removed. Security teams should also look for activity that seems suspicious, whether through hunting or security tool alerts, while also focusing on higher-value targets such as administrators or services operating with elevated privileges.</p> <p>Mandiant's overlay of adversary techniques with MITRE ATT&CK is reasonably comprehensive, and they should use these tools and guidelines as a starting point, but it will take work," Nikkel said. "Finally, understanding where potential attacks might occur through a third party or an otherwise uncontrolled attack surface is crucial. Implementing controls through a zero-trust model may also be a worthwhile look since this can take away an attacker's ability to move throughout a network and take other arbitrary actions post-compromise. This takes some planning and work to implement effectively. You can have a strong castle with the best defenders and defenses available, but if you left the back door open, it's all for naught."</p> <p>Chuck Everette, director of cybersecurity advocacy at Deep Instinct, explained that the threat actors named UNC2452 are a sophisticated group of cybercriminals. Historically, he said they have targeted government entities, technology firms, and some institutions of higher education and their main goal</p>

	<p>revolves around the stealing of information. This includes emails, intellectual property, and internal security documents.</p> <p>“They don’t seem to be interested in PII or financial data, nor are they disruptive or destructive,” Everette said. “This group is a large collective of highly-skilled personnel that is well-resourced, with dedicated infrastructure, and thought to be nation-state sponsored due to the information stolen being of use to a country or military organization. The data has had very little economic value, but significant value to governments.”</p> <p>Everette added that the nature of their attacks are not performed by a standard playbook or a normal linear progression: they are highly adaptive, they use a large number of sophisticated techniques to manipulate and access multiple systems, creating backdoors for future return visits. Everette said their latest attack vectors have been heavily focused on the use of the Golden SAML Attack.</p> <p>“Once they’ve gained access into the victim’s environment, they then steal the encrypted token signing certificate for the environment,” Everette said. “This allows them to create backdoors into email systems, databases, as well as create fake AD accounts and modify trusted domains they can then forage authentication tokens and bypass MFA and password requirements for systems such as Office 365. This essentially allows them to authenticate as any Office 365 user.”</p> <p>John Hammond, senior security researcher at Huntress, said these new observations against UNC2452 ultimately boil down to the core steps outlined in the standard cyber kill chain.</p> <p>“Once a threat actor gains access into an environment, they maintain persistence with certain implants, move laterally across different targets and continue post-exploitation,” Hammond said. “Given Mandiant's research on UNC2452, security teams should specifically monitor rogue activity in mailboxes, unordinary account usage in event logs, and revisit the trusts and access policies between local systems and cloud service providers.”</p>
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HEADLINE	10/29 Massachusetts health network hacked
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/massachusetts-health-network-hacked-patient-info-exposed
GIST	<p>A Worcester, Mass. health care network says someone hacked into its employee email system, potentially exposing the personal information of thousands of patients.</p> <p>UMass Memorial Health notified patients earlier this month if their information was involved in the breach, which occurred between June 2020 and January. The personal data included Social Security numbers, insurance information and medical information, The Telegram & Gazette reported Thursday.</p> <p>More than 200,000 patients and health plan participants could have been affected by the breach, according to a federal database of cybersecurity incidents at medical facilities.</p> <p>The hospital says it has investigated the incident but couldn’t determine how much of the personal information may have been stolen.</p> <p>Affected patients will receive free credit monitoring and data protection assistance.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/30 Iran-linked hackers breach Israeli company
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/apparent-iran-linked-hackers-breach-israeli-internet-firm
GIST	<p>Hackers believed to be linked to Iran have breached an Israeli internet hosting company, taking down several of its sites, local media reported.</p> <p>The cyberattack hit websites including of Israeli public transport companies Dan and Kavim, a children's museum and public radio's online blog, with none of the sites available to users by midday Saturday.</p>

The hacking group known as Black Shadow claimed responsibility for the attack and published what it said was client data, including the names, email addresses and phone numbers of Kavim clients, on the Telegram messaging app.

"Hello Again! We have news for you," the hackers wrote in a message on Telegram on Friday night.

"You probably could not connect to many websites today. 'Cyberserve' company and their customers (were) hit by us," it said.

"If you don't want your data leak(ed) by us, contact us SOON."

Later another message read: "They did not contact us... so (the) first data is here," with the group dumping the information online.

Israeli media said Black Shadow is a group of Iran-linked hackers who use cyberattacks for criminal ends.

The group [breached Israel's Shirbit insurance firm](#) in December last year, stealing a trove of data.

It demanded a \$1 million ransom and began leaking the information when the firm refused to pay.

The new attack comes after an unprecedented, unclaimed [cyberattack wrought havoc on Iran's petrol distribution system](#) this week.

Iranian media have pointed the finger at government opponents abroad.

Iran and Israel have been engaged in a so-called "[shadow war](#)", including several reported attacks on Israeli and Iranian ships that the two have blamed on each other, as well as cyberattacks.

In 2010 the Stuxnet virus -- believed to have been engineered by Israel and its ally the US -- infected Iran's nuclear programme, causing a series of breakdowns in centrifuges used to enrich uranium.

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HEADLINE	10/29 FBI raids China payment-terminal company
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/fbi-raids-chinese-paymentterminal/
GIST	<p>Law enforcement agencies in the United States have searched the Florida premises of a Chinese payment-terminal provider.</p> <p>A warehouse and offices belonging to multinational Pax Technology were scoured by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Homeland Security, and other agencies on Tuesday after concerns were reportedly raised over the company's security.</p> <p>The FBI said that the search at the site in Jacksonville had been undertaken "in furtherance of a federal investigation."</p> <p>Pax was founded two decades ago and is headquartered in Shenzhen. According to its website, the company has delivered over 57 million terminals to more than 120 countries. In addition to payment terminals, Pax manufactures PIN pads and point-of-sale (POS) hardware and software.</p> <p>News of the raid was broken by local Florida news outlet WOKV. When queried about the coordinated law enforcement action, the FBI issued the following statement:</p> <p>"The FBI Jacksonville Division, in partnership with Homeland Security Investigations, Customs and Border Protection, Department of Commerce, and Naval Criminal Investigative Services, and with the support of the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, is executing a court-authorized search at this location in furtherance of a federal investigation.</p>

"We are not aware of any physical threat to the surrounding community related to this search. The investigation remains active and ongoing and no additional information can be confirmed at this time." Pax Technology said that it takes security very seriously and was unaware of any allegations of illegal activity.

"As always, Pax Technology is actively monitoring its environment for possible threats. We remain committed to providing secure and quality software systems and solutions," [said](#) a company spokesperson.

They added: "Pax Technology is not aware of any illegal conduct by it or its employees and is in the process of engaging counsel to assist in learning more about the events that led to the investigation."

The company's British office wrote to its customers in the UK to say that no security issues had occurred.

In the [letter](#), which was viewed by the BBC, the company said: "No confidential customer information or transaction data was sent from any Pax device sold in the US or UK."

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HEADLINE	10/29 Spike: Snake malware biting hard
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/snake-malware-biting-hard-on-50-apps-for-only-25/
GIST	<p>Cybercriminals are flooding to use the Snake password-stealing trojan, making it one of the popular malware families used in attacks.</p> <p>Snake has been active since November 2020 and is a different project from the ransomware operation that used the same name in the past.</p> <p>Written in .NET and using the same staging mechanism as FormBook and Agent Tesla, researchers from Cybereason take a deep dive into how the rising threat operates.</p> <p>Wide range of malicious features</p> <p>Cybercriminals currently sell Snake on dark web forums for as low as \$25, which could be why we see a spike in its deployment.</p> <p>Mainly deployed in phishing campaigns, Snake installed via malicious email attachments or through drops sites reached by clicking on email links.</p> <p>When installed on a computer, Snake is capable of stealing credentials from over 50 apps, including email clients, web browsers, and IM platforms.</p> <p>Some of the more popular programs targeted by Snake include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discord ▪ Pidgin ▪ FileZilla ▪ Thunderbird ▪ Outlook ▪ Brave browser ▪ Chrome ▪ Edge ▪ Firefox ▪ Opera ▪ Vivaldi ▪ Yandex <p>Snake also features keystroke logging, clipboard data theft capabilities and can even capture screenshots of the entire screen, which are then uploaded back to the threat actor.</p>

Other features include stealing OS data, memory space info, geolocation, date-time information, IP addresses, and more.

A [previous analysis from HP](#) has shown that threat actors may use the geolocation data to restrict installation based on the victim's country.

All in all, it's a versatile info-stealer for its cost and has been successful at hiding from security solutions.

Evading detection

To avoid detection, Snake disables AV defenses by killing the associated processes and goes as far as to disable network traffic analyzers such as Wireshark.

Snake then adds itself to the exclusion list of the Windows Defender, allowing it to execute malicious PowerShell commands without being detected.

Snake adds a scheduled task and edits a registry key to execute when a user logs in to Windows to establish persistence.

Finally, it is noteworthy that Snake gives its operators the versatility to choose what features they will activate on the malware during the packing stage.

This customization allows them to stay hidden by reducing the use of features in targeted attacks.

Finally, when it comes to data exfiltration, Snake uses either an FTP or SMTP server connection or an HTTPS POST on a Telegram endpoint.

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HEADLINE	10/30 Chaos ransomware targets gamers
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/chaos-ransomware-targets-gamers-via-fake-minecraft-alt-lists/
GIST	<p>The Chaos Ransomware gang encrypts gamers' Windows devices through fake Minecraft alt lists promoted on gaming forums.</p> <p>Minecraft is a massively popular sandbox video game currently played by over 140 million people, and according to Nintendo sales numbers, it's a top-seller title in Japan.</p> <p>Masked as an 'alt list' text file</p> <p>According to researchers at FortiGuard, a recently discovered variant of the Chaos ransomware is being tentatively distributed in Japan, encrypting the files of Minecraft players and dropping ransom notes.</p> <p>The lure used by the threat actors are 'alt list' text files that supposedly contain stolen Minecraft account credentials, but in reality, is Chaos ransomware executable.</p> <p>Minecraft players who want to troll or grief other players without the risk of their accounts being banned will sometimes use 'alt' lists to find stolen accounts that they can use for bannable offenses.</p> <p>Due to their popularity, alt lists are always in demand and are commonly shared for free or through automated account generators that supply the community with "spare" accounts.</p> <p>The Chaos Ransomware</p> <p>When encrypting victims, the Chaos ransomware will append four random characters or digits as the extension to encrypted files.</p> <p>The ransomware will also drop a ransom note named 'ReadMe.txt,' where the threat actors demand 2,000 yen (~\$17.56) in pre-paid cards.</p>

A destructive infection

This particular variant of the Chaos Ransomware is configured to search the infected systems for different file types smaller than 2MB and encrypts them.

However, if the file is larger than 2MB it will inject random bytes into the files, making them unrecoverable even if a ransom is paid.

Due to the destructive nature of the attack, those who pay the ransom can only recover smaller files.

The reason for this functionality is unclear, and it could be caused by poor coding, incorrect configuration, or to damage gamers' files purposely.

In this particular campaign, the threat actors are promoting text files to create a false sense of security while swapping them out in the end with executables.

Users should be suspicious of and not execute any files they download from the Internet unless they trust the site and have scanned it with a tool like VirusTotal.

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HEADLINE	10/31 Password sprays target cloud accounts
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/microsoft/microsoft-warns-of-rise-in-password-sprays-targeting-cloud-accounts/
GIST	<p>The Microsoft Detection and Response Team (DART) says it detected an increase in password spray attacks targeting privileged cloud accounts and high-profile identities such as C-level executives.</p> <p>Password spraying is a type of brute force attack where the attackers attempt to gain access to large lists of accounts using a small number of commonly used passwords.</p> <p>These attacks often use the same password while switching from one account to another to find easy to breach accounts and avoid triggering defenses like password lockout and malicious IP blocking (when using a botnet).</p> <p>This tactic makes it less likely to trigger an account lock as it happens when they're targeted in classic brute-forcing attacks that quickly try to log into a small number of accounts by going through an extensive password list, one account at a time.</p> <p>"Over the past year, the Microsoft Detection and Response Team (DART), along with Microsoft's threat intelligence teams, have observed an uptick in the use of password sprays as an attack vector," DART said. "Recently, DART has seen an uptick in cloud administrator accounts being targeted in password spray attacks, so understanding the targets is a good place to start."</p> <p>DART recommends enabling and enforcing multi-factor authentication (MFA) across all accounts whenever possible and adopting passwordless technology to drastically lower the risk of account compromise when targeted by such attacks.</p> <p>Admins and high profile accounts increasingly targeted</p> <p>As Microsoft revealed one year ago, password spray attacks are among the most popular authentication attacks amounting to over a third of enterprise account compromises, according to Alex Weinert, Director of Identity Security at Microsoft.</p> <p>DART has seen a wide array of administrator accounts with various permissions being targeted in recent password spray attacks.</p>

	<p>The list of most popular targets includes accounts ranging from security, Exchange service, global, and Conditional Access administrators to SharePoint, helpdesk, billing, user, authentication, and company admins.</p> <p>Besides this type of privileged accounts, threat actors have also attempted to compromise identities with a high profile (including C-level executives) or access to sensitive data.</p> <p>"It is easy to make exceptions to policy for staff who are in executive positions, but in reality, these are the most targeted accounts. Be sure to apply protection in a democratic way to avoid creating weak spots in configuration," DART added.</p> <p>In July, the NSA revealed that the Russian state-backed Fancy Bear hacking group launched password spray attacks against U.S. and foreign organizations, including the U.S. government and Department of Defense agencies, from Kubernetes clusters.</p> <p>Microsoft also said earlier this month that it spotted both Iran-linked DEV-0343 and the Russian-sponsored Nobelium groups using password sprays in attacks targeting defense tech companies and managed service providers (MSPs) or cloud service providers, respectively.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/29 Targeting connected car infrastructure
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/cybercriminals-take-aim-at-connected-car-infrastructure
GIST	<p>With automobiles becoming increasingly connected, a variety of attacks are emerging: Car thieves abuse keyless entry systems, hackers find new ways to exploit vehicle components, and fraud targets auto financing, automotive cybersecurity experts said in interviews this week.</p> <p>In September, for example, New York City police raided a car-theft ring that reportedly stole cars using cloned key fobs based on security codes bought online and encoded into a device by a local locksmith. They also used an aftermarket scanning tool, typically used by mechanics, to reprogram targeted cars' ignitions to make them think all the keys had been lost.</p> <p>The rise in electronic-enabled thefts is only one unintended consequence of the rapid adoption of connected software in the automotive space, says Guy Molho, vice president of products for Upstream, provider of cybersecurity services for the industry.</p> <p>"Auto OEMs are running to provide their customers with a lot of new capabilities, and these are new surfaces for hackers and attack vectors," he says. "That surface area is just going to grow, because it is no longer just a car — it's a software platform on wheels."</p> <p>Welcome to the future of connected cars. Potential dangers go beyond alleged digital-enabled car thieves in New York City. In the United Kingdom, another group used a device resembling a Game Boy to fool the keyless entry systems and steal more than 30 Mitsubishi Outlanders in less than three months, according to another report.</p> <p>A variety of other attacks — from ransomware shutting down car manufacturers, such as Renault and Honda, to a white-hat researcher able to take limited remote control of Teslas — indicate the connectivity that allows high-tech cars to provide new features also represents a massive increase in their attack surface. In 2020, 54.6% of such incidents involved a black-hat hacker, while white-hat researchers were involved in most of the rest, according to Upstream data. A small but growing percentage are owners investigating their own vehicles.</p> <p>And the number of connected cars continues to grow. Currently, about a quarter of automobiles are connected to a network in some way. By 2025, seven out of every eight vehicles will be connected.</p>

	<p>"Cyber threats in the automotive ecosystem are especially worrying due to the potential direct impact on road users' safety and security," Upstream stated in its annual "Global Automotive Cybersecurity Report." "Vehicles themselves can be dangerous; coupled with connectivity, the modern vehicle is particularly [dangerous]."</p> <p>While the best-known security incident involving an automobile is the 2015 Jeep Cherokee hack that allowed Charlie Miller and Chris Valasek to take control of a car, the most common attacks are attempts to compromise servers that host automotive services (40%), attacks using the key fob or keyless entry (25%), and attacks targeting automotive applications for mobile devices (9%). Attacks that target the infotainment system, use the onboard diagnostics (OBD) port, or target a manufacturer's IT network each make up 6% of cases.</p> <p>Looking ahead, attempts at mass compromise will become more common and thus target components of the connected infrastructure, says Tomer Porat, lead analyst for Upstream.</p> <p>"The attack vectors will be servers and exploiting vulnerabilities through the IT infrastructure of the OEM," he says. While some of the issues will come from poor design, others will be caused by human error, according to Porat. "Developers often make mistakes, posting sensitive information on GitHub and other public places, exposing the infrastructure."</p> <p>The auto ecosystem is also rife with financial fraud, says Frank McKenna, chief fraud strategist and co-founder of Point Predictive, a firm that provides tools to combat financial fraud. Fraudsters, consumers, and even dealers often play fast and loose with applications for car loans to ensure they make the sale.</p> <p>About 80% of lending fraud is committed so a consumer can qualify for a car loan; about 20% involves criminals trying to make a profit, McKenna says.</p> <p>"The minute that a consumer tells you that they make twice as much money as they are actually making, when they start to lie to you on material facts, then that is fraud," he says. "Fraud can cost auto lenders anywhere from 50 basis points to 3% , if a lender does not have good controls."</p> <p>Finally, the amount of data produced and consumed by connected cars has grown significantly. A modern connected vehicle will generate gigabytes of data per day, which poses a problems for security controls, says Upstream's Molho.</p> <p>"Cars produce so much data, so most of the connected vehicles have 5G connectivity to support the amount of data," he says. "With over-the-air updates, they are getting new features all the time, and the data keeps growing."</p>
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HEADLINE	10/29 Hive ransomware encrypts Linux, FreeBSD
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/hive-ransomware-now-encrypts-linux-and-freebsd-systems/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>The Hive ransomware gang now also encrypts Linux and FreeBSD using new malware variants specifically developed to target these platforms.</p> <p>However, as Slovak internet security firm ESET discovered, Hive's new encryptors are still in development and still lack functionality.</p> <p>The Linux variant also proved to be quite buggy during ESET's analysis, with the encryption completely failing when the malware was executed with an explicit path.</p> <p>It also comes with support for a single command line parameter (-no-wipe). In contrast, Hive's Windows ransomware comes with up to 5 execution options, including killing processes and skipping disk cleaning, uninteresting files, and older files.</p>

The ransomware's Linux version also fails to trigger the encryption if executed without root privileges because it attempts to drop the ransom note on compromised devices' root file systems.

"Just like the Windows version, these variants are written in Golang, but the strings, package names and function names have been obfuscated, likely with gobfuscate," ESET Research Labs [said](#).

Ransomware now interested in Linux servers

[Hive](#), a ransomware group active since [at least June 2021](#), has already hit over 30 organizations, counting only victims who refused to pay the ransom.

They're just one of many ransomware gangs that have begun targeting Linux servers after their enterprise targets have slowly migrated to virtual machines for easier device management and more efficient use of resources.

By targeting virtual machines, ransomware operators can also encrypt multiple servers at once with a single command.

In June, researchers spotted a [new REvil ransomware Linux encryptor](#) designed to target VMware ESXi virtual machines, a popular enterprise virtual machine platform.

Emsisoft CTO [Fabian Wosar](#) told BleepingComputer that other ransomware groups, such as Babuk, RansomExx/Defray, Mespinoza, GoGoogle, DarkSide, and Hellokitty have also created their own Linux encryptors.

"The reason why most ransomware groups implemented a Linux-based version of their ransomware is to target ESXi specifically," Wosar said.

HelloKitty and BlackMatter ransomware Linux encryptors were later discovered in the wild by security researchers in [July](#) and [August](#), confirming Wosar's statement.

One month later, it was discovered that some of [these Linux malware strains are also buggy](#) and could damage victims' files during encryption.

In the past, the Snatch and PureLocker ransomware operations have also used Linux variants on their attacks.

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HEADLINE	10/29 Police sting targets ransomware operators
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/ransomware-police-sting-targets-suspects-behind-1800-attacks-that-wreaked-havoc-across-the-world/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Twelve people have been targeted by an international law enforcement operation for involvement in over 1,800 ransomware attacks on critical infrastructure and large organisations around the world.</p> <p>A statement by Europol describes the 12 suspects in Ukraine and Switzerland as "high-value targets" responsible for "wreaking havoc across the world" by distributing LockerGoga, MegaCortex, Dharma and other ransomware attacks against organisations in 71 countries.</p> <p>But it's unclear if the individuals have been arrested or charged – a Europol spokesperson told ZDNet that "the judicial process is ongoing".</p> <p>The suspects are believed to have various different roles in "aggressive" criminal organisations responsible for encrypting networks with ransomware and demanding a payment in exchange for the decryption key.</p>

Some of the suspects are thought to be involved in compromising the IT networks of targets, while others are suspected of being in charge of laundering Bitcoin payments made by victims.

Europol says that those responsible for breaking into networks did so by using techniques including brute force attacks, SQL injections and sending [phishing emails](#) with malicious attachments in order to steal usernames and passwords.

Once inside the networks, the attackers remained undetected and gained additional access using tools including [TrickBot malware](#), [Colbalt Strike](#) and PowerShell Empire, in order to compromise as many systems as possible before triggering ransomware attacks.

As a result of the operation, over \$52,000 in cash was seized, alongside five luxury cars. A number of computers have also been seized and are being examined in order to secure evidence and identify new leads.

In total, more than 50 investigators from agencies around the world – including six Europol specialists – were involved in the operation, which was coordinated by Europol's European Cybercrime Centre (EC3).

This included: Norway's National Crime Investigation Service; France's National Police and the Public Prosecutor's Office of Paris; the Dutch National Police and National Public Prosecution Service; Ukraine's National Police of Ukraine and Prosecutor General's Office; the United Kingdom's National Crime Agency (NCA) and Police Scotland; Germany's Police Headquarters Reutlingen; the Switzerland Federal Police and Polizei Basel-Landschaft; and the United States Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) and Secret Service.

A recent [European Union Agency for Cybersecurity report](#) warned that ransomware is the biggest cybersecurity issue facing the world today.

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HEADLINE	10/31 Massive cyber heist rocks high-end jeweler
SOURCE	https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10148265/Massive-cyber-heist-rocks-high-society-jeweller-Graff.html
GIST	<p>Hackers have plundered the personal details of world leaders, Hollywood A-listers and billionaire tycoons in a massive 'virtual heist' on exclusive jewellery firm Graff, The Mail on Sunday can reveal.</p> <p>The cyber criminals have already leaked 69,000 confidential documents on to the so-called 'dark web', including files relating to Donald Trump, Oprah Winfrey, David Beckham and Sir Philip Green. And they are thought to be demanding tens of millions of pounds in ransom money to stop the release of further sensitive information.</p> <p>The notorious Russian hacking gang Conti is behind the data theft and claims the information published, involving about 11,000 of Graff's well-heeled clients, represents just one per cent of the files it stole.</p> <p>Documents including client lists, invoices, receipts and credit notes have been taken, and could prove embarrassing for customers who may, for example, have bought gifts for secret lovers or taken jewellery as bribes.</p> <p>'Given the profile of the customer database, this is absolutely massive,' said Philip Ingram, a former colonel in British military intelligence.</p> <p>'This is going to bring the highest levels of international law enforcement down on the gang, and that's going to give them a whole lot of headaches in trying to get the ransom paid and then get away with it.' Cyber experts believe the extortionists will demand payment either in an untraceable cyber currency such as Bitcoin – or even in jewels.</p>

Around 600 British customers are among the victims so far named, including Formula One heiress Tamara Ecclestone and former footballer Frank Lampard, who was previously pictured leaving Graff's flagship London store with his wife Christine Bleakley.

International superstars on the list include Hollywood actors Tom Hanks, Samuel L Jackson and Alec Baldwin, already troubled after accidentally shooting dead cinematographer Halyna Hutchins on the set of his latest film.

Singer Tony Bennett also features in the leak, while two addresses for US chat show queen Oprah Winfrey and seven for Donald and Melania Trump were published.

Conti, which is believed to be based near St Petersburg, released the first cache of customer information earlier this month on the dark web, a secretive part of the internet known as a haven for terrorists and criminals – who could potentially use the material for theft, extortion or blackmail.

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), which can impose multi-million pound fines on companies that fail to keep customers' data secure, said it was investigating the breach.

London-based Graff, which was founded by 83-year-old Laurence Graff, a self-styled 'King of Bling', said it had informed those whose personal data may have been accessed.

But one well-known British millionaire named in the files as having bought a pair of yellow and white diamond earrings worth £237,000 in January last year said he had not been notified.

The Conti cyber hack is not the first time the jewellery empire that Laurence Graff (pictured below) founded when he was 18 has suffered at the hands of hardened criminals.

In August 2009, two sharply dressed men entered the Graff Diamonds branch in Mayfair, pulled out handguns and started threatening staff.

A female shop assistant was forced to empty the display cabinets before being taken hostage.

The raiders freed her in the street, firing a shot into the air and escaping in a BMW with a haul of 43 rings, bracelets, necklaces and watches, valued at nearly £40 million.

But the two robbers left a mobile phone behind as they swapped escape cars. Numbers on it led to the culprits, who had spent four hours being disguised by a professional make-up artist who thought it was for a music video.

In all, five men were jailed for their involvement in the raid. But none of the stolen jewellery in Britain's largest unsolved gems heist was ever recovered.

Almost three decades earlier, in September 1980, the 45-carat Marlborough diamond – worth more than £2 million at today's prices – was stolen from a Graff store in Knightsbridge.

Although the two robbers, believed to be members of the Chicago Mafia, were arrested and jailed, the diamond, which once belonged to the wife of the Duke of Marlborough, a cousin of Winston Churchill, was never recovered. The pair were believed to have posted their haul to New York on their way home.

Now worth £2.9 billion, Laurence Graff, 83, started as an apprentice in the diamond district of Hatton Garden, London. The 15-year-old East End boy scrubbed floors and cleaned toilets while taking classes in his spare time at the Central School of Arts and Crafts, where he was told he would 'never make the grade'.

Determined to prove his teachers wrong, Mr Graff began selling his own designs in 1960 and opened two London boutiques two years later. Now, there are more than 60 worldwide. Former US President Donald

Trump bought his wife Melania's £1 million, 15-carat emerald cut diamond engagement ring from Graff, adding a Graff 25-carat ring worth £2.8 million for their tenth anniversary.

In October 2009, The Mail on Sunday revealed that Mr Graff had fathered a love-child at the age of 71 with a former employee 34 years his junior. He announced his divorce from Anne Marie, but they decided to stay together minutes before their court hearing.

The couple have two sons – Francois, 56, chief executive of his father's business empire, and Stephane, 55, a successful artist – as well as a daughter, Kristelle, 41.

Separately, the documents show that Mr Beckham, his wife Victoria and their eldest son Brooklyn – who has posted images of jewellery bought for his actress fiancée Nicola Peltz on social media – are Graff customers.

The documents also reveal that the charity Make A Wish Foundation UK spent £60,000 on a Princess Butterfly Watch in October 2019. The charity said the watch was purchased for a fundraising auction in 2019.

Former Topshop boss Sir Philip Green and his wife Lady Tina are listed as clients of Graff, which has a store in Monaco, where the family's £100 million superyacht Lionheart is moored. The New York address of Britain's wealthiest man Sir Len Blavatnik, also appears, as does that of financier George Soros.

The socialite Ghislaine Maxwell, who is awaiting trial on charges of recruiting underage girls for the late serial paedophile Jeffrey Epstein, is also listed.

The files do not state what, if anything, she bought, but it gives her then billing and shipping address as being in St Thomas in the US Virgin Islands, close to the island of Little Saint James, where Epstein abused some of his victims.

Erbolat Dosaev, a former deputy prime minister of Kazakhstan, was another customer. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is listed as a Graff client in Monaco, as is Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the ruler of Dubai.

The prime minister of Bahrain, Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, and former prime minister of Qatar, Sheikh Bin Jabr Al Thani Hamad Bin Jassim, are also named.

Another document shows that the late Tetra Pak billionaire Hans Rausing bought a pair of ruby waterfall earrings for £89,000 and white diamond earrings for £29,000 in 2019.

Cyber experts said it was most likely that the hackers gained access to Graff's files by sending an email which duped a member of staff into opening a file containing a sophisticated 'ransomware' computer virus.

This would have given the hackers a 'back door' to steal the company's data, bypassing any anti-virus software or firewall.

Daria-Romana Pop, intelligence analyst for cyber threat firm Kela, said: 'After they deliver the ransomware note, the operators usually start leaking data to intimidate the victim.

'It starts with one per cent of the files to persuade the victim to pay the ransom and it may take from days to weeks to leak all the data, depending on the negotiation. In this specific attack, it took them one week to publish.

'Conti is also known for threatening to disclose attacks to the victims' clients, partners and other parties. Conti and other ransomware groups usually define the ransom depending on the size of the company and its revenue.

Conti's ransom demands start very high, about ten per cent of the victim's annual revenues.'

A spokesman for the ICO, which can impose fines of up to four per cent of company turnover, said: 'We have received a report from Graff Diamonds Ltd regarding a ransomware attack. We will be contacting the organisation to make further enquiries in relation to the information that has been provided.'

A spokesperson for Graff, which according to its latest accounts had revenues of £450 million in 2019, said: 'Regrettably we, in common with a number of other businesses, have recently been the target of a sophisticated – though limited – cyber attack by professional and determined criminals.'

'We were alerted to their intrusive activity by our security systems, allowing us to react swiftly and shut down our network. We notified, and have been working with, the relevant law enforcement agencies and the ICO.'

'We have informed those individuals whose personal data was affected and have advised them on the appropriate steps to take.'

The firm said it had been able to 'rebuild and restart our systems within days – crucially with no irretrievable loss of data'.

Russian cyber crooks top FBI's most wanted

By [Jonathan Bucks For The Mail On Sunday](#)

The infamous Conti gang of cyber hackers has claimed responsibility for the audacious 'virtual heist'. Previously, the Russian-based group has penetrated the security of more than 400 organisations, including Government agencies in Scotland and the Irish Republic.

Late last year, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency fell victim to one of the group's most devastating hacks.

More than 4,000 of the agency's files were leaked onto the internet, including sensitive operational material and embarrassing staff emails complaining about the quango's 'toxic' management.

The files were released when the agency refused to pay a ransom, but the affair is thought to have cost it about £800,000.

In May, Conti infiltrated the Irish Health Service, disrupting Covid-19 testing and causing the cancellation of patient appointments.

However, the Graff raid could be the biggest 'diamond' heist of all time – without a single stone being touched. Reams of personal information, including the home addresses of wealthy and famous Graff clients, have been poured out on the 'dark web' – with the threat of much more to follow if the gang is not paid.

The proceeds of such cyber crime funds lavish lifestyles.

Maksim Yakubets, the 34-year-old alleged head of hacking group Evil Corp and top of the FBI's cyber most wanted list, drives a camouflage Lamborghini and is married to the daughter of a retired senior officer in the FSB, the Russian security service.

Conti, like many ransomware groups, operates by sending a fake – or 'phishing' – email containing a link or attachment that installs a virus into the target's computer network. This provides access to data systems for weeks or even months before a ransom demand is eventually made.

Experts believe that the Conti ransomware virus is operated by Wizard Spider, a group based in St Petersburg, Russia, which has been linked to possible foreign espionage activities.

Wizard Spider is also thought to be behind another infamous hacking group, Ryuk.

Conti targets organisations they believe will pay the largest ransom, and which they hope are most readily willing to pay.

There is no suggestion that Graff is negotiating with the hackers.

Such cybercrime is becoming common. The Information Commissioner's Office issued a record £42 million in fines last year.

The notorious Russian hacking gang Conti is behind the data theft and claims the information published, involving about 11,000 of Graff's well-heeled clients, represents just one per cent of the files it stole.

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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	11/01 Afghan unpaid doctors, Taliban clash
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/afghan-hospital-unpaid-doctors-rigid-taliban-clash-80898336
GIST	<p>KABUL, Afghanistan -- The Taliban-appointed supervisor of a small district hospital outside the Afghan capital has big plans for the place — to the dismay of the doctors who work there.</p> <p>Mohammed Javid Ahmadi, 22, was asked by his superiors, fresh off the fields of battle from a war that has spanned most of his life, what kind of jobs he could do. On offer were positions in an array of ministries and institutions now under the Taliban's power following their August takeover and the collapse of the former government.</p> <p>It was Ahmadi's dream to be a doctor; poverty had kept him from gaining admission to medical school, he said. He chose the health sector. Soon after, the Mirbacha Kot district hospital just outside of Kabul became his responsibility.</p> <p>"If someone with more experience can take this position it would be better, but unfortunately if someone (like that) gets this position, after some time you'll see that he might be a thief or corrupt," he said, highlighting a perennial problem of the former government.</p> <p>It's a job Ahmadi takes very seriously, but he and the other health workers in the 20-bed hospital rarely see eye-to-eye. Doctors are demanding overdue salary payments amid critical shortages of medicine, fuel and food. Ahmadi's first priority is to build a mosque inside the hospital quarters, segregate staff by gender and encourage them to pray. The rest will follow according to the will of God, he tells them.</p> <p>The drama in Mirbacha Kot is playing out across Afghanistan's health sector since the Taliban takeover. With power changing hands overnight, health workers have had to contend with a difficult adjustment. The host of problems that preceded the Taliban's rise were exacerbated.</p> <p>The U.S. froze Afghan assets in American accounts shortly after the takeover, in line with international sanctions, crippling Afghanistan's banking sector. International monetary organizations that once funded 75% of state expenditures paused disbursements, precipitating an economic crisis in the aid-dependent nation.</p> <p>Health is acutely affected. World Bank allocations funded 2,330 out of Afghanistan's 3,800 medical facilities, including the salaries of health workers, said the Taliban's Deputy Health Minister Abdulbari Umer.</p> <p>Wages had been unpaid for months before the government collapsed.</p> <p>"This is the biggest challenge for us. When we came here there was no money left," said Umer. "There is no salary for staff, no food, no fuel for ambulances and other machines. There is no medicine for hospitals; we tried to find some from Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, but it's not enough."</p> <p>In Mirbacha Kot, doctors have not been paid in five months.</p>

Disheartened staff continue to attend to up to 400 patients a day, who come from the neighboring six districts. Some have general complaints or a heart condition. Others bring sick babies.

'What can we do? If we don't want to come here there's no other job for us. If there was another job, nobody can pay us. It's better to stay here,' said Dr. Gul Nazar.

Every morning, Ahmadi makes his rounds. His small frame, topped by a black turban, is a sharp contrast to the sea of white coats that routinely rush in and out of the facility to tend to patients.

The first order of the day is the registration book. Ahmadi wants every doctor to sign in and out. It's a formality most health workers are too busy to remember, but neglecting it is enough to inspire Ahmadi's ire.

Second, the mosque.

Workers come to the hospital to take measurements for the project and Ahmadi gives them orders.

"We are Muslims, and we have 32 staff members, and for them, we need a mosque," he said.

There are many benefits, he added. Relatives can stay with sick patients overnight, sleeping in the mosque, as the hospital lacks extra beds especially during the winter months. "And this is what is needed the most," he said.

Dr. Najla Quami looked on, bewildered.

She, too, has not been paid in months and routinely complains of medicine shortages in the maternity ward. They have no pain medication for expectant mothers. The pharmacy is stocked only with analgesic and some antibiotics. Is this the time for a mosque, she asked.

But Ahmadi said it was the responsibility of non-governmental organizations to resume their aid programs to finance these shortages. The money for the mosque will come from local donations.

His arrival ushered in other sweeping changes.

Men and women were told to stay in separate wards. Female doctors are forbidden to go to the emergency room. Ahmadi ordered them to wear a head covering and focus on female patients.

"We can't go to the other side of the hospital," said Dr. Elaha Ibrahim, 27. "Woman is woman, man is man, he told us."

Due to shortages, doctors advise patients to find medications elsewhere and return. Ibrahim said Ahmadi often scrutinizes her prescriptions.

"He isn't a doctor, we don't know why he is here, we ask ourselves this all the time," he said.

But Ahmadi is quick to allege deeply entrenched corruption in the hospital under the former hospital administrator, his predecessor from the former government.

He said he was aghast to uncover an entire warehouse full of medical equipment, furniture and other stolen goods to be sold in the market for personal profit. He could not offer proof that this was the intention of the previous administrator.

He sees his job to meticulously ensure that never happens again, echoing the Taliban's broader aims for the nation.

	<p>Doctors are routinely lambasted by angry patients, most of whom can't afford to pay for the life-saving medicines. "All of them fight with us," Ibrahimi said.</p> <p>Staff working the night shift say there is no food. The power shuts off for hours in the day with generator fuel quickly running out.</p> <p>Quami holds a mobile phone for light as she makes her way to check on malnourished babies.</p> <p>"Every doctor here is in a deep depression," she said.</p> <p>Ahmadi, by contrast, said his dreams were finally coming true.</p> <p>Working in the hospital has afforded something life growing up poor never could: A medical education.</p> <p>He claims that in the past two months he has learned how to administer injections and prescribe basic pharmaceuticals. He said that's part of the reason why he scrutinizes Ibrahimi's prescriptions.</p> <p>"I know the names of the medicines needed for different conditions," he said proudly. Recently, after a car accident, he was on the scene to provide an injection of painkillers, he added.</p> <p>Ahmadi still dreams of being a doctor, and, like the health workers he supervises, hopes the money comes through somehow.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/01 Taliban tries to win over Afghan Shiites
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/taliban-afghanistan-hazaras/2021/11/01/096c9690-3775-11ec-9662-399cfa75efee_story.html
GIST	<p>KABUL — As a military commander, Maulavi Mahdi never captured territory or killed Americans in battle. Yet the Taliban considers the 33-year-old ethnic Hazara a godsend.</p> <p>Last year, the militants made Mahdi a shadow district governor in his birthplace. Then, they showcased a video of him on their website to glorify his credentials. On a recent trip to Kabul, he was housed in a large villa with a garden, which the Taliban typically reserves for its most senior leaders. Mahdi knows why.</p> <p>"I am a bridge between the Taliban and the Hazara community," he said.</p> <p>Of all the history the Taliban has with other Afghan groups, none is more tortured than the one with the country's Hazara minority. When they first rose to power in the mid-1990s, the hard-line Sunni militants massacred, kidnapped and uprooted thousands of Shiite Hazaras, declaring them infidels. They destroyed Hazara cultural heritage sites and extended their political and economic marginalization by different Afghan regimes. Tens of thousands of Hazaras have fled the country.</p> <p>How the Taliban treats Hazaras in its new regime will serve as an essential barometer to gauge the militants' claim they have changed and deserve international recognition and financial support.</p> <p>On one level, Mahdi's elevation represents a change from the past — one based on strategic calculations to attract local support in minority communities and create the semblance of diversity within the militants' ranks. To that end, the Taliban has dispatched Mahdi to Hazara areas as an emissary and set up informal Shiite courts for the first time to attract more Hazaras.</p> <p>"This new Islamic Emirate is not the same as the old Islamic Emirate," said , wearing a black turban as he squeezed a string of yellow prayer beads. "It is dominated by religious scholars who do not act based on ethnicity but only on establishing an Islamic system."</p>

Yet Mahdi is also a stark reminder of the limits of the Taliban's professed intentions. In peace talks this year, the predominantly ethnic Pashtun militants promised Afghans and the international community that the rights and aspirations of Hazaras and other ethnic and tribal groups would be enshrined in an inclusive Afghanistan.

But in the Taliban's interim government, none of the 33 cabinet members are Hazara. Last month, Taliban officials in five provinces forcibly evicted hundreds of Hazara families from their homes and farms, according to Human Rights Watch. And recently, senior Taliban officials met families of suicide bombers to hand them cash and promises of land. Many had killed hundreds of Hazaras in attacks.

Mahdi holds a minor post inside the Taliban: He is now the Taliban's intelligence chief in Bamian province, a mostly Hazara region. Skeptics say he's a foil to prevent a full-fledged Hazara uprising rather than a serious agent of reconciliation.

"He's not the kind of national figure that could appeal to the Hazara community," said Ali Adili, an Afghan researcher focusing on the Hazara community who recently fled to Northern Virginia. "He's young and also not well educated."

The Taliban also has yet to properly investigate or discipline any of its fighters or loyalists for crimes they've committed against Hazaras, community leaders and analysts said.

"That would have sent a much stronger message," said Ashley Jackson, an expert on the Taliban at the Overseas Development Institute. "That kind of accountability would have been more meaningful to a lot of people, both in the Hazara community and the international community, as opposed to trotting out a symbolic Hazara."

Mahdi, she added, is a "a public relations attempt," at best. "It feels very cosmetic."

From fleeing to embracing

Born in a tiny village called Hosh in northern Afghanistan, Mahdi was 8 years old when the Taliban seized Kabul in 1996. Three years later, the Taliban bombarded his district of Balkhab. He fled with his family to Iran, like many Hazaras, returning only after the militants were driven from power after the Sept. 11 attacks.

Back in Hosh, Mahdi attended school and seemed set to take over the family farm. But in his early 20s, a corrupt local Hazara commander allied with the U.S.-back government seized their family lands, Mahdi said. In retaliation, Mahdi and his friends kidnapped the commander's son, according to villagers and analysts. After district elders intervened, the commander returned the lands, and Mahdi released his son.

That night, the commander's forces surround Mahdi's home. As he tried to escape, clashes erupted. Mahdi was injured and hospitalized. He was then jailed. He would spend the next seven years in prisons, where he met and interacted with Taliban inmates.

He grew more devout in prison, studying the Koran and praying with militants five times a day.

"He also met Taliban mullahs inside the prison," said Salman Akhlaki, a childhood friend. "When he was released, I saw a big change in his behavior and in his body."

When Mahdi returned home to Afghanistan at the age of 29, he started to hold meetings to encourage other Hazaras to join the Taliban, speaking out against the U.S. military and corruption of the U.S.-backed government. He and his fresh recruits soon became pariahs, he acknowledged.

"The Shiite community saw us through a black lens," Mahdi said. "They considered us barbarians. Even my immediate community saw me as a traitor."

But as Mahdi's pro-Taliban militia grew, a pro-government Hazara warlord sought his allegiance. But Mahdi, said, he turned him down because "he was on the wrong path. He preferred houses and other luxuries over religion and the country."

Soon after, Mahdi's militia came under attack by government forces. By his own account, he fled to neighboring Samangan province.

To the Taliban, however, Mahdi's profile was appealing. In recent years, the Taliban has sought to recruit from Afghanistan's other ethnic groups to portray itself as a national insurgency. Today, there are ethnic Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Turkmen among the ranks of Taliban fighters.

After capturing Kabul, Taliban leaders visited the Hazara community in the capital to assure them of peace and security. They allowed Shiite religious celebrations to take place.

The militants gave Mahdi the religious title of "Maulavi," given to teachers of Islamic law, in an attempt to bolster his credentials and appeal.

"Maulavi Mahdi is following the orders and rules of the Islamic Emirate," said Bilal Karimi, the Taliban's deputy spokesman. "People are very pleased with him due to his service. He is a very devoted person."

'It will eventually attract support'

Recently, Mahdi met one of his mentors, Sayed Hesham Jawadi Balkhabi, a pro-Taliban Hazara cleric, at a compound in West Kabul, where most of the capital's Hazara community lives.

In an office, two Shiite Taliban religious scholars were convening an informal court to resolve a land dispute. A man said his community had bought the land in 1986 but the other party faked the deed in 2003 and claimed ownership after bribing corrupt local officials to back his claim.

It soon became clear he was trying to ingratiate himself with the Taliban.

"For 20 years, injustice dominated," he told the judge. "From the day the Islamic Emirate has taken over, people are happy. Their complaints are being addressed."

'Everyone here hated the Americans': Rural Afghans live with the Taliban and a painful U.S. legacy

The judge replied that the other party was ill and requested four days to prepare his case. "After reviewing all documents, we will make a final decision," he said. "We will serve justice. The rightful one will own the land."

Then, the second judge sensed a public relations opportunity. He nodded at a Washington Post journalist observing the session and said to the man: "Tell them that you are happy with the new government."

The man repeated the compliment.

During its previous rule, the Taliban didn't allow courts that employed Shiite jurisprudence or Shiite religious scholars, Balkhabi said. "For many people, it was unbelievable that the Taliban respect and give freedom of practice to Shiite in this level," he added.

"If the Taliban continues its soft policy toward Hazaras, it will eventually attract support from the community," Mahdi said.

But even in Kabul, the Taliban's apparent change is questionable. The militants are considering abolishing the country's 2004 constitution, which protected the legal rights of Shiites, to instead adopt parts of the 1964 one established during the monarchy of King Mohammed Zahir Shah.

"That constitution does not recognize the Shiite jurisprudence," said Adili, the researcher.

'The enemy of my enemy'

During a recent visit to Ghazni province, the memory of the Taliban's July massacre of Hazaras in a rural district was still fresh. Not one Hazara on the street had heard of Mahdi.

"In every community, there are people who work for the Taliban for making a living," said Ibrahim Salehi, the Hazara Imam of Mohammad Mustafa Mosque, the largest Shiite mosque in Ghazni. "Their lives, perhaps, would be endangered if they were not supporting the Taliban."

The Taliban's own actions are undercutting Mahdi's efforts. Officials have described the mass evictions of Hazaras as tribal disputes and a massacre of several Hazaras in Ghazni in July, according to Human Rights Watch, as propaganda, despite testimonies and evidence presented by human rights groups that asserts otherwise.

As the Taliban bars some girls from school, their mothers' dreams are also shattered

When asked if the Taliban had held its fighters or anyone else accountable for the recent assaults, Karimi replied that "there are no such targeted killings of the Hazara community" or "of any civilians on the basis of ethnicity."

Mahdi also towed the Taliban line. He dismissed the evictions as "personal acts of people" and the massacre as "fake news and propaganda."

Mahdi and his supporters hope that pragmatism could outweigh any mistrust. The Islamic State's Afghanistan and Pakistan branch has been targeting Shiites, including two devastating suicide bombings in Kunduz and Kandahar last month that killed scores.

The violence, Balkhabi noted, could convince many Hazaras to embrace the Taliban, if only for protection.

"The enemy of my enemy is our friend," said the cleric with a smile.

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HEADLINE	10/29 DHS: terrorists not infiltrating from Mexico
SOURCE	https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20211029-official-reject-claims-of-terrorists-infiltrating-u-s-from-mexico
GIST	<p>Fears the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan could reinvigorate terror groups like al-Qaida and Islamic State, and lead to a surge of attempted infiltrations along the southern U.S. border have not been realized, a top counterterrorism official said, dismissing claims to the contrary as "factually inaccurate."</p> <p>For months, mostly Republican lawmakers have warned of an unprecedented number of encounters by law enforcement and border patrol agents with known or suspected terrorists trying to enter the United States from Mexico.</p> <p>One fact sheet distributed earlier this week by Republican Representative John Katko, the ranking member of the House Homeland Security Committee, warned terrorists "are crossing the border 'at a level we have never seen before.'"</p> <p>But the Department of Homeland Security's top counterterrorism official rejected such allegations Thursday, telling an online forum there is no evidence to back them up.</p> <p>"That just simply is not the case," DHS Counterterrorism Coordinator John Cohen said in response to a question from VOA. "It is just factually inaccurate to frame the southern border as a place where we are seeing a significant number of al-Qaida or ISIS-related terrorists or foreign terrorists."</p>

Cohen did not share any specific data on the number of encounters with known or suspected terrorists along the U.S. border with Mexico, characterizing it only as “very low.”

He said such encounters are also “low in comparison to people who are seeking to travel to the United States through the aviation infrastructure, through the northern border.”

The refusal to publicly disclose the actual number of encounters with terrorists along the U.S. southern border with Mexico has been a point of contention with Republican lawmakers, who have repeatedly pressed DHS to share the information.

During a hearing in September, Louisiana Republican Representative Clay Higgins chastised Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas for ignoring an “obvious threat.”

“I’m 60 years old, I’ve never seen anything like this in America,” Higgins told Mayorkas. “We’ve been invaded.”

Higgins further alleged a source told him that about 200 known or suspected terrorists have been detected crossing the southern border, calling it a “conservative estimate.”

VOA reached out to Higgins’ office asking for clarification on his allegations. His office has yet to respond.

Other lawmakers have pointed to a September 11, 2021, letter from former U.S. Customs and Border Patrol Chief Rodney Scott, which warned, “control of our borders has disintegrated overnight.”

Gaps in border security are “exploited to easily smuggle contraband, criminals, or even potential terrorists into the U.S. at will,” Scott wrote, urging lawmakers to request detailed data.

“You will find this data troubling,” he wrote. “This is not hyperbole.”

Mayorkas and other officials admit data does exist, but say it is classified, and that claims like those by Scott mischaracterize the situation.

“Our border security efforts are layered and include multiple levels of rigorous screening that allow us to detect and prevent people who pose national security or public safety risks from entering the United States,” an official with CBP told VOA last month.

“Encounters of known and suspected terrorists at our borders are very uncommon,” the official added. However, such encounters do happen.

In April, CBP admitted it had stopped two men from Yemen, both on the U.S. terror watch list and the FBI’s No-Fly List, from trying to cross into the state of California.

The separate incidents, one from January and one from March, were only disclosed after House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy went on Fox News and charged border patrol agents were now finding known or suspected terrorists from Yemen, Iran and Turkey.

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HEADLINE	10/31 Former Afghan spies, soldiers turn to IS
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/left-behind-after-u-s-withdrawal-some-former-afghan-spies-and-soldiers-turn-to-islamic-state-11635691605?mod=hp_lead_pos9
GIST	KABUL—Some former members of Afghanistan’s U.S.-trained intelligence service and elite military units—now abandoned by their American patrons and hunted by the Taliban—have enlisted in the only force currently challenging the country’s new rulers : Islamic State.

The number of defectors joining the terrorist group is relatively small, but growing, according to Taliban leaders, former Afghan republic security officials and people who know the defectors. Importantly, these new recruits bring to Islamic State critical expertise in intelligence-gathering and warfare techniques, potentially strengthening the extremist organization's ability to contest Taliban supremacy.

An Afghan national army officer who commanded the military's weapons and ammunition depot in Gardez, the capital of southeastern Paktia province, joined the extremist group's regional affiliate, [Islamic State-Khorasan Province](#), and was killed a week ago in a clash with Taliban fighters, according to a former Afghan official who knew him.

The former official said several other men he knew, all members of the former Afghan republic's intelligence and military, also joined Islamic State after the Taliban searched their homes and demanded that they present themselves to the country's new authorities.

A resident of Qarabagh district just north of Kabul said his cousin, a former senior member of Afghanistan's special forces, disappeared in September and was now part of an Islamic State cell. Four other members of the Afghan national army that the man knew have enlisted in the group, also known as ISIS-K, in recent weeks, he said.

"In some areas, ISIS has become very attractive" to former members of Afghan security and defense forces "who have been left behind," said Rahmatullah Nabil, a former head of Afghanistan's spy agency, the National Directorate of Security, who left the country shortly before the Taliban takeover. "If there were a resistance, they would have joined the resistance." But, he said: "For the time being, ISIS is the only other armed group."

Taliban forces in early September stamped out a nascent resistance movement in the Panjshir valley led by Ahmad Massoud, a son of anti-Taliban commander Ahmad Shah Massoud who was assassinated by al Qaeda in 2001. Resistance leaders then fled abroad.

The Taliban have long alleged that Islamic State-Khorasan Province was a creation of Afghanistan's intelligence service and the U.S. that aimed to sow division within the Islamist insurgency, a claim denied by Washington and by Kabul's former government.

Hundreds of thousands of former Afghan republic intelligence officers, soldiers and police personnel are unemployed and afraid for their lives despite pledges of amnesty from the Taliban. Only a fraction of them, mostly in the National Directorate of Security, have returned to work under Taliban supervision. Like nearly all other Afghan government employees, they haven't been paid for months.

"It's exactly how it started in Iraq—with disenchanted Saddam Hussein generals," a senior Western official warned. "You have to be careful." The U.S. disbanded Iraq's security forces after the 2003 invasion of the country. Often with weapons stashed at home and with years of combat expertise, they provided a ready pool of recruits for militant groups, including al Qaeda and the precursor of Islamic State.

In addition to protection from the Taliban, Islamic State is offering significant amounts of cash to its new members in Afghanistan, security officials say. In recent Senate testimony, Colin Kahl, U.S. undersecretary of defense for policy, warned that Islamic State in Afghanistan could generate the capacity to attack the West and allies within six to 12 months.

While the Taliban are highly motivated to go after Islamic State, he added, "Their ability to do so, I think, is to be determined."

Though the Taliban and Islamic State both say they want to impose a strict Islamic order in Afghanistan, the two groups have deep religious, ideological and political differences. The Taliban mostly follow the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam, believe in an Afghan nation-state and say they seek good relations with all countries, including the U.S. They view the country's Shiite Hazara minority as fellow Muslims.

Islamic State follows the more rigid Salafi Islamic tradition, considers Shiites to be apostates who should be physically exterminated, and seeks to establish a world-wide Islamic caliphate through military conquest.

While influenced by Islamic State's original leaders in Syria and Iraq, Islamic State-Khorasan Province was established in 2014 by Afghan and Pakistani Taliban militants who felt the Taliban leadership, by then seeking peace talks with the U.S., wasn't radical enough. The group controlled several districts of eastern Afghanistan until a Taliban offensive in 2015 dramatically weakened the group.

Islamic State-Khorasan Province, however, has rebounded this year, taking advantage of the collapse of the Afghan republic and the withdrawal of the U.S. counterterrorism presence.

The group killed 200 Afghans and 13 members of the U.S. armed forces at Kabul airport in August, and has since then carried out a spate of attacks on the Taliban, mostly in the eastern province of Nangarhar, but now increasingly often in Kabul. The group also claimed responsibility for bombing Shiite mosques in the cities of Kunduz and Kandahar in October. Those attacks killed well over 100 worshippers.

While the U.S. has begun providing some intelligence on Islamic State to the Taliban, Taliban officials are loath to admit that cooperation and generally dismiss the severity of Islamic State's challenge.

"We are not faced with a threat nor are we worried about them," said Mawlawi Zubair, a senior Taliban commander whose 750 men oversee southwestern Kabul and who operates out of the capital's third police district headquarters. "There is no need, not even a tiny need, for us to seek assistance from anyone against ISIS."

The area under his supervision includes the Kabul zoo, where a man believed to be an Islamic State militant recently threw a hand grenade into a crowd of Taliban foot soldiers. Former members of the Afghan security forces are "100%" involved in such Islamic State attacks, Mr. Zubair said.

He said Islamic State is also feeding on growing resentment over the country's economic meltdown that followed the Taliban's Aug. 15 takeover.

"In the current situation, we are not dealing with a few difficulties, we are facing many," Mr. Zubair said. "If we get rid of all our economic and administrative problems, ISIS will disappear in 15 days in all of Afghanistan."

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HEADLINE	10/31 Questions arise over Afghan refugee vetting
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/oct/31/10000-afghans-resettled-two-months-after-evacuatio/
GIST	<p>Nearly 10,000 Afghans brought out of their country during the U.S. airlift have been processed, released and resettled into the U.S. over the past two months, with some 53,000 still at military bases getting ready to be discharged.</p> <p>As the Afghans begin to build new lives, more concrete details are emerging about who made it out of the country and who was left behind in the largest evacuation airlift in world history.</p> <p>The number of U.S. citizens who weren't evacuated soared in recent weeks as more people came forward to ask for help.</p> <p>In congressional testimony last week, a top Defense Department official revealed that 216 Americans were looking to get out and another 243 had alerted the U.S. government that they intended to stay in Afghanistan. That was 76 more people than the administration announced days earlier and far more than the 100 or so that the State Department said were in Afghanistan in early September, after the airlift operation had ended.</p>

The State Department said the rising number is a good sign because it means the U.S. has successfully transported Americans out of Afghanistan in the weeks after the Taliban resumed control.

Republican senators, though, labeled the situation a “hostage crisis” and demanded that President Biden do more to keep his promise to withdraw troops until every American was out.

A deputy secretary of state told Congress that, at the current pace, everyone who wants to leave Afghanistan will be able to “in the next couple of weeks.”

Even as the number of Americans left behind rises, questions are increasing about the 76,000 or so Afghans who evacuated on U.S.-orchestrated flights.

Government officials say about 3,000 are still at “lily pad” sites overseas awaiting more scrutiny or, in a small number of cases, have been deemed too risky to bring to the U.S. and are awaiting relocation elsewhere.

About 4,000 Afghan evacuees already had legal permanent resident status in the U.S.

That means the vast majority of Afghans were brought into the U.S. under Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas’ parole powers, short-circuiting checks that would have been performed overseas.

Of those, nearly half are expected to be eligible for the special visa available to Afghans who assisted the U.S. war effort, or their families. The rest will have to apply for other types of long-term legal status.

Some 53,000 Afghans are at military bases in eight states, and nearly 10,000 have been released and resettled into communities, government officials said.

The vetting process is also becoming clearer.

A senior Defense Department official told senators last week that evacuees were flown from Afghanistan to “lily pad” sites in other countries, where they were fingerprinted and had biographic information taken. That data was run through systems from the FBI, the National Counterterrorism Center and Customs and Border Protection to spot any serious criminal record or flags of potential terrorism.

Those with clean records were allowed to board planes to the U.S., while those flagged in the records check underwent face-to-face interviews.

That is a departure from the refugee or special visa process, which would have required an in-person interview for any applicant before reaching the U.S. The deviation has raised concerns among Republicans on Capitol Hill.

Biden officials said in-person inspections are conducted at the port of entry, where a CBP officer can recheck databases, ask questions, search belongings and require more intense secondary inspections.

Indeed, it was CBP officers who flagged two Afghan evacuees who were flown to the U.S. despite having major felony records and previous deportations.

That they were nabbed at the second check “shows our system is working,” said Emily Horne, a spokesperson for the National Security Council.

Sen. Josh Hawley, Missouri Republican, challenged the administration last week over the lack of overseas interviews for all Afghans.

“Joe Biden’s withdrawal from Afghanistan was an absolute disaster that left 13 American service members dead and hundreds of Americans and allies stranded behind enemy lines. Now we’re learning that there are major issues with the vetting of people we did manage to evacuate and bring to America,”

Mr. Hawley said in a statement to The Washington Times. “Joe Biden and his administration need to be held accountable for their failures and they must provide answers on their vetting procedures.”

Homeland Security said the vetting is multilayered and aimed at protecting Americans.

“This process includes intelligence, law enforcement, and counterterrorism professionals reviewing fingerprints, photos, and biographic data for each Afghan national before they are cleared to travel to the United States,” the department said in a statement. “As with other arrivals at U.S. ports of entry, Afghan evacuees undergo a primary inspection when they arrive at a U.S. airport, and a secondary inspection is conducted as the circumstances require.”

Then there are Afghans who did assist the U.S. war effort but didn’t make it onto evacuation flights. Most lawmakers on Capitol Hill say they should be a priority.

Sen. Jim Risch, Idaho Republican, said senators were working on more than 16,000 cases of such people near the end of the operation and only about 110 were found to have been successfully evacuated. That suggests thousands were left behind with their lives in danger.

Brian McKeon, deputy secretary of state for management, said he understood the frustration but added that U.S. personnel had to be careful. He pointed to some flights out of Mazar-e-Sharif that were supposed to be carrying a few Americans and some Afghans.

Without Americans on the ground, it’s difficult to get a manifest. Stowaways were found after reaching Qatar, which created new challenges.

“We have an agreement with Qatar. If these planes come, these people are likely coming to the United States. We’re not going to leave them in Qatar,” Mr. McKeon told senators.

Officials declined to speak about the number of Afghans deemed too risky to bring to the U.S. and about the Afghans who reached the U.S. but were found to be deportable.

The Biden administration is not taking Afghans back to their country. Officials said they would try to find third countries to take them.

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HEADLINE	10/31 Afghan art survive new Taliban regime?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/31/world/asia/afghanistan-taliban-artists.html
GIST	<p>The day Afghanistan’s president, Ashraf Ghani, fled and handed the country over to the Taliban, Omaid Sharifi was in downtown Kabul, helping his colleagues paint murals on the wall of the governor’s office. By noon, panicked employees in nearby government buildings were flooding the streets, some jumping into cars, others pedaling bicycles or running to get home, or to the airport.</p> <p>Mr. Sharifi, 36, decided to leave his work unfinished, asking his colleagues to pack the painting tools and head to the office.</p> <p>The Taliban were in charge of the country’s capital a few hours later. Mr. Sharifi stayed at home for a week, until he and his family were evacuated to the United Arab Emirates on Aug. 22.</p> <p>Since the Taliban’s return to power, hundreds of artists — actors, comedians, singers, musicians and painters — have fled Afghanistan, according to estimates provided to The New York Times by several of them. Some have resettled in the United States, France or Germany, while others are waiting in third countries, unsure where they will be allowed to live long-term.</p> <p>Most left because they feared for their lives; others simply saw no future in the country, and were certain they would not be able to continue practicing their art and feeding their families.</p>

Under the new government, there has been a concerted campaign to remove artworks from all aspects of life, in an attempt to make society more Islamic, the Taliban have said. In doing so, the group is erasing two decades of craftsmanship that blossomed after the collapse of its first government in 2001.

The Taliban have closed music schools and covered up public murals. Radio and television networks have stopped airing songs, as well as musical and comedy shows. Production of Afghan films has come almost completely to a halt.

“The future of art and culture seems bleak,” Mr. Sharifi said from Virginia, where he and his family have resettled. “It is not possible for the Taliban to live with art.”

It took more than seven years for ArtLords, the organization Mr. Sharifi led, to paint roughly 2,200 murals, mainly on blast walls, in Kabul and elsewhere in the country, promoting messages of peace, human rights and gender equality, among other issues.

But the Taliban labeled those colorful murals propaganda of the previous government. Less than three months after seizing power, they’ve covered most of them with white paint and replaced them with religious poetry or pro-Taliban messages.

“It is like losing a child. I feel like a part of my body has been chopped off,” Mr. Sharifi said. “We painted under the scorching sun, and during the freezing winter. We were threatened at gunpoint, but continued painting.”

The Taliban haven’t officially imposed any nationwide restrictions on artistic activities. But they also have shown no sign that their government will allow art as a form of free expression in the society they wish to lead, and their actions so far foretell an uncertain future for thousands of artists.

The Taliban “believe art is a path to corruption and vice in society,” said Samiullah Nabipour, the former dean of the fine arts school at Kabul University. Mr. Nabipour said he lived fearfully in hiding for two months before he and his family were evacuated last week.

But the Taliban have rejected this, saying their government will not oppose art as long as it doesn’t violate Islamic laws.

“We will define the status and position of music and art once the Islamic system is fully formed,” Zabihullah Mujahid, the Taliban’s top spokesman, told The Times. “Anything that has been banned in Islam will be treated based on Islamic teachings, and we will oppose them.”

Afghan artists fear that the Taliban’s harsh interpretation of Islam means almost all forms of art will be banned, except for calligraphy, religious poetry and certain literature.

Mr. Mujahid told The Times after the Taliban’s takeover in August that they considered music to be “forbidden” by Islam, but that they hoped to persuade people not to listen to it rather than force them.

Even before the Taliban’s return to power, life wasn’t easy for Afghan artists. They faced constant harassment, threats and intimidation from conservative, hard-line clerics and their followers, and even from insurgent groups — not to mention the struggle to earn a steady income that artists the world over endure. With the Taliban in power, those still in the country believe their lives as well as their careers are now at risk.

After the fall of Kabul, some artists hid any works that they had created, or that they owned. Others were so scared that they destroyed their paintings, sculptures or musical instruments.

“I have deleted all my music and songs from my phone and am trying to stop talking about music,” said Habibullah Shabab, a popular singer from southern Afghanistan who was a contestant on “Afghan Star,” a singing show similar to “American Idol.”

“When I am alone listening to my songs, my previous videos and memories, I cry a lot in my heart that where I was before, and where I am now,” he added.

Mr. Shabab now runs a vegetable stand to feed his family of nine.

The Taliban prohibited music and movies when they led the country in the 1990s, severely punishing those who were caught violating the ban. Other forms of artistic activities or entertainment were also forbidden. They blew up two iconic Buddha statues in the central province of Bamiyan that had been carved into a mountain in the sixth century, and they smashed thousands of smaller sculptures.

But after their first regime was overthrown with the U.S.-led invasion, art and entertainment saw a dramatic resurgence, much of it funded by international donors. Production companies began producing movies and television series, and a new generation of comedians and singers rose to fame, entertaining millions. Graffiti art, which didn’t exist in Afghanistan before 2001, flourished in urban areas.

Afghan artists criticized the Taliban’s bloody insurgency. Comedians roasted the militants on television networks, painters expressed their abhorrence of the way they carried out attacks, and musicians sang anti-Taliban songs.

Now, seemingly overnight, the art scene has vanished, and many fear that the new government will punish them for their critical views.

The Taliban vowed greater tolerance and freedom when they entered Kabul in August. But on Saturday, Taliban fighters raided a wedding reception in eastern Nangarhar and killed three people for playing music, according to witnesses. The Taliban confirmed the attack, but condemned the gunmen and said they had been detained.

Artists have not forgotten the Taliban’s long history of such attacks. “The roots of art dried up when the Taliban came to power in the 1990s,” said Roya Sadat, an award-winning Afghan filmmaker.

Ms. Sadat visited the United States for a work trip in May, but she couldn’t return to Afghanistan because of the deteriorating security. She is working on a scripted film about the political activities of Afghan women in the 1960s; the original plan was to shoot it in Afghanistan, but now she is looking for other locations.

“It is sad to see the future of the country without art and artists,” Ms. Sadat said.

Whether such artists can continue their work in new countries is another open question.

Some say they are optimistic that they can compete in the markets of their new countries. Mr. Sharifi said he has already registered ArtLords as a charity and a limited liability company in Virginia. Ms. Sadat said she was working on movies, including a documentary, and directing a show for the Seattle Opera.

Many artists continue to work on unfinished projects for the organizations that hired them in Afghanistan. Others have been sponsored by universities or nonprofits to take part in short-term programs, just to get them out of the country to safety. But what awaits them after those projects end is unknown.

Mr. Nabipour, the former dean of fine arts, said he had been invited by the art, film and visual studies program at Harvard University to work as a research assistant professor for 10 months.

“I have no idea what to do or what may happen after 10 months,” he said. “I am really worried about it.”

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HEADLINE	10/31 Military jury rebukes torture; asks clemency
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/31/us/politics/quantanamo-torture-letter.html

GUANTÁNAMO BAY, Cuba — In a stark rebuke of the torture carried out by the C.I.A. after the Sept. 11 attacks, seven senior military officers who heard graphic descriptions last week of the brutal treatment of a terrorist while in the agency's custody wrote a letter calling it "a stain on the moral fiber of America."

The officers, all but one member of an eight-member jury, condemned the U.S. government's conduct in a clemency letter on behalf of [Majid Khan](#), a suburban Baltimore high school graduate turned Qaeda courier.

They had been brought to the U.S. Navy base at Guantánamo Bay to sentence Mr. Khan, who had earlier pleaded guilty to terrorism charges. They issued a sentence of 26 years, about the lowest term possible according to the instructions of the court.

At the behest of Mr. Khan's lawyer, they then took the prerogative available in military justice of writing a letter to a senior official who will review the case, urging clemency.

Before sentencing, Mr. Khan spent two hours describing in grisly detail the [violence that C.I.A. agents and operatives inflicted on him](#) in dungeonlike conditions in prisons in Pakistan, Afghanistan and a third country, including sexual abuse and mind-numbing isolation, often in the dark while he was nude and shackled.

"Mr. Khan was subjected to physical and psychological abuse well beyond approved enhanced interrogation techniques, instead being closer to torture performed by the most abusive regimes in modern history," according to the letter, which was obtained by The New York Times.

The panel also responded to Mr. Khan's claim that after his capture in Pakistan in March 2003, he told interrogators everything, but "the more I cooperated, the more I was tortured," and so he subsequently made up lies to try to mollify his captors.

"This abuse was of no practical value in terms of intelligence, or any other tangible benefit to U.S. interests," the letter said. "Instead, it is a stain on the moral fiber of America; the treatment of Mr. Khan in the hands of U.S. personnel should be a source of shame for the U.S. government."

In his testimony on Thursday night, Mr. Khan became the first former prisoner of the C.I.A.'s so-called black sites to publicly describe in detail the violence and cruelty that U.S. agents used to extract information and to discipline suspected terrorists in the clandestine overseas prison program that was set up after the attacks on Sept. 11, 2001.

In doing so, Mr. Khan also provided a preview of the kind of information that might emerge in the [death penalty trial](#) of the five men accused of plotting the Sept. 11 attacks, a process that has been bogged down in pretrial hearings for nearly a decade partly because of secrecy surrounding their torture by the C.I.A.

The agency declined to comment on the substance of Mr. Khan's descriptions of the black sites, which prosecutors did not seek to rebut. It said only that its detention and interrogation program, which ran the black sites, ended in 2009.

More than 100 suspected terrorists disappeared into the C.I.A.'s clandestine overseas prison network after Sept. 11, 2001. The agency used "enhanced interrogation techniques" such as waterboarding, sleep deprivation and violence to try to have prisoners divulge Al Qaeda's plans and the whereabouts of leaders and sleeper cells, but with no immediate plans to put its captives on trial.

President George W. Bush disclosed the existence of the C.I.A. program in September 2006, with the transfer of Mr. Khan and 13 other so-called high-value detainees to Guantánamo. President Barack Obama ordered the program shut down entirely after taking office in 2009.

Mr. Khan, 41, was held without access to either the [International Red Cross](#), the authority entrusted under the Geneva Conventions to visit war prisoners, or to a lawyer until after he was transferred to Guantánamo

Bay. He pleaded guilty in February 2012 to terrorism crimes, including delivering \$50,000 from Al Qaeda to an allied extremist group in Southeast Asia, Jemaah Islamiyah, that was used to fund a deadly [bombing of a Marriott hotel](#) in Jakarta, Indonesia, five months after his capture. Eleven people were killed, and dozens more were injured.

The clock on his prison sentence began ticking with his guilty plea in 2012, meaning the panel's 26-year sentence would end in 2038.

But Mr. Khan, who has cooperated with the U.S. government, helping federal and military prosecutors build cases, has a deal that was kept secret from the jury that could end his sentence in February or in 2025 at the latest.

Under the military commission system that was set up after Sept. 11, even defendants who plead guilty and make a deal with the government must have a jury sentencing hearing. This was the case for Mr. Khan, whose sentencing was delayed by nearly a decade to give him time to work with government investigators and win favor in the form of early release from a jury sentence.

The clemency letter also condemned the legal framework that held Mr. Khan without charge for nine years and denied him access to a lawyer for the first four and half as "complete disregard for the foundational concepts upon which the Constitution was founded" and "an affront to American values and concept of justice."

Although it is rarely done, a military defense lawyer can ask a panel for letters endorsing mercy, such as a reduction of a sentence, for a service member who is convicted at a court-martial.

But this was the first time the request was made of a sentencing jury at Guantánamo, where accused terrorists are being tried by military commission. A clemency recommendation is not binding, but it could send a powerful message to the convening authority of military commissions, the senior Pentagon official overseeing the war court, whose role is to review a completed case and an accompanying clemency petition from defense lawyers to decide whether to shorten a sentence. An Army colonel, Jeffrey D. Wood of the Arkansas National Guard, currently fills that role as a civilian.

In closing arguments, Mr. Khan's military lawyer, Maj. Michael J. Lyness of the Army, asked the panel for a minimum sentence and then to consider drafting a letter recommending clemency.

The lead prosecutor, Col. Walter H. Foster IV of the Army, asked the panel to issue a harsh sentence. He conceded that Mr. Khan received "extremely rough treatment" in C.I.A. custody but said he was "still alive," which was "a luxury" that the victims of Qaeda attacks did not have.

The jury foreman, a Navy captain, said in court that he took up the defense request and drafted the clemency letter by hand, and all but one officer on the sentencing jury signed it, using their panel member numbers because jurors are granted anonymity at the national security court at Guantánamo.

Ian C. Moss, a former Marine who is a civilian lawyer on Mr. Khan's defense team, called the letter "an extraordinary rebuke."

"Part of what makes the clemency letter so powerful is that, given the jury members' seniority, it stands to reason that their military careers have been impacted in direct and likely personal ways by the past two decades of war," he said.

At no point did the jurors suggest that any of Mr. Khan's treatment was illegal. Their letter noted that Mr. Khan, who never attained U.S. citizenship, was held as an "alien unprivileged enemy belligerent," a status that made him eligible for trial by military commission and "not technically afforded the rights of U.S. citizens."

	<p>But, the officers noted, Mr. Khan pleaded guilty, owned his actions and “expressed remorse for the impact of the victims and their families. Clemency is recommended.”</p> <p>Sentencing was delayed for nearly a decade after his guilty plea to give Mr. Khan time and opportunity to cooperate with federal and military prosecutors, so far behind the scenes, in federal and military terrorism cases. In the intervening years, prosecutors and defense lawyers clashed in court filings over who would be called to testify about Mr. Khan’s abuse in C.I.A. custody, and how.</p> <p>In exchange for the reduced sentence, Mr. Khan and his legal team agreed to drop their effort to call witnesses to testify about his torture, much of it most likely classified, as long as he could tell his story to the jury.</p> <p>The jurors were also sympathetic to Mr. Khan’s account of being drawn to radical Islam in 2001 at age 21, after the death of his mother, and being recruited to Al Qaeda after the Sept. 11 attacks. “A vulnerable target for extremist recruiting, he fell to influences furthering Islamic radical philosophies, just as many others have in recent years,” the letter said. “Now at the age of 41 with a daughter he has never seen, he is remorseful and not a threat for future extremism.”</p> <p>The panel was provided with nine letters of support for Mr. Khan from family members, including his father and several siblings — American citizens who live in the United States — as well as his wife, Rabia, and daughter, Manaal, who were born in Pakistan and live there.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/31 Inside the making of domestic terror plot
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/inside-making-domestic-terror-plot-average-guys-race/story?id=80643666 https://abcnews.go.com/US/infiltrated-mom-secret-recordings-track-demise-domestic-terror/story?id=80643710
GIST	<p>This is part 1 (and Part 2) of a three-part ABC News series looking at one chilling case of right-wing extremism in America’s heartland.</p> <p>Dan Day, a God-fearing family man, describes his shotgun, two rifles and three handguns as “a bare minimum” for anyone in Kansas.</p> <p>He fiercely defends the Second Amendment and the right of Americans to form militias. Years ago, he developed a distaste for “everything the government is,” he said.</p> <p>Then he became one of the FBI’s most unexpected informants, and derailed a domestic terrorism plot that authorities determined could have eclipsed the Oklahoma City bombing.</p> <p>For more than a year, in the midst of 2016’s polarizing presidential campaign, Day braved a twisted world of hatred and violence, putting his life and his family on the line to infiltrate a radical militia group bent on killing Muslims in small-town Garden City, Kansas. Their attack was slated for the day after the election.</p> <p>“It sounds so far-fetched, but it’s not,” said Day, 53. “And if it can happen in southwest Kansas, it can happen anywhere.”</p> <p>In a series of exclusive interviews with ABC News’ George Stephanopoulos, he and his family opened up for the first time about what they endured over many months when Day befriended three murderous men and secretly recorded hundreds of hours with them.</p> <p>His story is featured in the new ABC News documentary “The Informant: Fear and Faith in the Heartland,” now available on Hulu. It also features exclusive interviews with the FBI agents and federal prosecutor who led the investigation.</p>

"I don't know how [Day] did it," said veteran national security prosecutor Tony Mattivi. "He knew ... the parade of horrors that could happen with one slip, with one mistake, and he did it anyway."

ABC News obtained a cache of recordings from Day's case, capturing the men's violent rhetoric and raw voices in real-time. The U.S. Justice Department has refused to release those recordings, which provide a chilling play-by-play from inside a domestic terrorism plot -- something rarely seen or heard by the public.

"I had to go along with them," Day said of the hate-fueled men he followed. "The double life got real, and scary."

'Really? That guy?'

When FBI agent Amy Kuhn, based out of the FBI's remote office in the small town of Garden City, Kansas, first suggested to her partner, Robin Smith, that they try to recruit Day as an informant in July 2015, Smith looked at her in bewilderment.

"Really? That guy?" Smith, who retired last year, recalled asking Kuhn.

Day, a former probation officer, had come onto the FBI's radar through a bizarre chain of events, which included Day unwittingly attending a recruitment event for a local militia.

Smith said Day, raised as a self-described "country boy" in Garden City, seemed to "fit the mold" of a militia member, not a government informant.

But Kuhn felt differently and persuaded Day to become an informant. Unlike many others who help the FBI, Day didn't have any charges hanging over his head. He agreed to do it simply because he cared about his community and his country, Kuhn said.

'Almost Satanic'

According to Kuhn, most militias are harmless, just "preppers" readying for "the zombie apocalypse" or whatever else they think might be coming. But when she recruited Day, the FBI was grappling with a growing faction of violent radicalism within the nation's militia movement.

For several months, Day didn't find that level of radicalism. Then in February 2016, Day was introduced to Patrick Stein, a member of another militia, the Kansas Security Force (KSF).

"And that's when things changed," Day said.

Stein, then 47, was a farmer in Wright, Kansas, about an hour away from Garden City.

He "seemed like a nice guy," someone who could "carry on an intelligent conversation" about farming or economics, but when the conversation turned to Muslims in the area, "He just went berserk ... almost Satanic," Day said.

ISIS had been launching attacks around the world and inspiring Americans to conduct their own attacks at home. The U.S. government expressed confidence in vetting [refugees](#) who fled ISIS in Syria and came to the United States, but the government also [acknowledged shortcomings](#).

To Stein, every Muslim inside the U.S. homeland posed a clear and present danger.

"They are the threat that we have in this country right now," Stein was recorded by Day saying.

Over and over again, Stein reduced innocent men, women and children to "cockroaches" that "need to be eradicated" simply for being Muslim.

He dubbed himself "Orkinman," like the exterminator.

'He's dangerous'

Garden City, with a population nearing 30,000, has in recent decades become a refuge for immigrants from around the world. Mexican and Vietnamese restaurants crowd many streets.

In the early 2000s, refugees fleeing al Qaeda-linked groups and civil war in Somalia began moving to Garden City. Many of them found jobs at a Tyson meatpacking plant on the outskirts of town, which has long served as an anchor for the city's immigrant community because it provides a reliable paycheck and a chance at the American dream.

Stein didn't see it that way.

"What g---mn company in their right mind would hire all these motherf---ing employees ... and hand them all these knives," he said on one of the recordings obtained by ABC News.

Muslims "would cut your f---ing throat if [they] had half a chance," Stein insisted.

The FBI hadn't heard of Stein or the KSF until Day warned Kuhn and Smith. "You need to watch this guy. He's dangerous," Day remembered telling them.

Based on Day's initial reports and recordings, the FBI also became concerned about two other KSF members, Curtis Allen and Gavin Wright, who worked together at Wright's mobile home dealership outside of town.

"My direction to Dan from the beginning was, 'Don't be the person to start anything. ... Don't be the idea planter. Just go along with what other people are saying,'" Kuhn said.

The group held militia events and nightly conference calls. They traded wild conspiracy theories, raged over President Barack Obama's willingness to bring refugees to the United States and used vile rhetoric to ridicule Somalis living in southeast Kansas.

Day often put the calls on speakerphone to record them for the FBI.

"We knew that we had some guys that really did not like the Muslim community," but even after tracking them for nearly four months, the FBI "didn't have a clear concept" that they were willing to take violent action, Smith said.

Then something big happened.

'Organization mode'

On June 12, 2016, 29-year-old Omar Mateen, who was born in New York to Afghan immigrants, opened fire inside the [Pulse Nightclub](#) in Orlando, Florida. Swearing [allegiance to ISIS](#), he killed 49 people and wounded scores more.

The attack spurred Stein to take action. Two days later, on a scorching hot day, Stein directed several KSF members to meet him in the middle of a field three hours outside Garden City. He said he wanted others to join him.

"I went into organization mode," Day recorded Stein saying during one conversation. *"I'm done waiting."* The field meeting was the first time the FBI had Day wear a hidden recording device -- a "big step" beyond just recording phone conversations like he'd been doing for months, Kuhn acknowledged.

"It wasn't like in the movies, with a van full of FBI agents 20 feet away [ready] to come in and rescue me" if something goes wrong, Day said. "I'm 60 miles away from everything. I'm on my own."

The FBI had concluded the field was so remote that, as Smith explained it, any “assets” or unfamiliar vehicles “likely would have been compromised.” So Day “was alone,” with “no backup,” said Mattivi, who oversaw the case.

Day had no doubt Stein or one of the others would kill him if they found out he was working for the FBI they might even bury him in the field right there, he said.

“The f---ing cockroaches in this country have got to go. Period,” Stein told the other KSF members, as Day recorded. *“They’re bringing them in by the f---ing planeload every goddamn day. That g----mn [racial slur] in the White House is making sure of it.”*

The meeting ended for Day when, about 20 minutes into Stein’s big pitch, Day fainted from heat exhaustion.

“You can’t make this stuff up,” Kuhn chuckled. “Craziness happens.”

After regaining consciousness, Dan immediately checked for the FBI’s recording device, concerned someone might have found it, he said.

It was still there, but it was “a very close call,” Day said. He was treated at a local hospital and released within hours.

‘Killing people’

Stein then convened two more recruitment meetings at a militia member’s home. Allen was apparently already onboard with the plan.

“It’s probably killing people and going to prison for life,” Day recorded Allen telling the KSF members gathered there in early July 2016.

In his interview with ABC News, Smith choked up thinking about when he first heard those recorded words.

“That to me showed a significant level of commitment that was nothing less than shocking,” Smith said, his voice cracking.

At the time, some of the other KSF members pushed back on what Stein and Allen were proposing.

“I’m not just gonna go up and start ... gunning down Muslims,” one woman was heard saying on Day’s recording from that day.

As a militia, KSF was meant to be “on the defensive,” she insisted.

“You want them to strike first?” Day asked.

“I’m not doing anything to risk my kids going in foster care,” the woman responded. *“I am 100 percent with a defensive position.”*

Ultimately, Allen, Wright and Day were the only ones who said they were willing to take up arms with Stein.

“We need to ... start planning it,” Allen declared after the last recruitment meeting. *“[But] I don’t know where we can meet to where we can openly talk.”*

“Well,” Wright suggested, *“I got my office,”* referring to a trailer on the lot of his business, G&G Home Center. *“We could meet in there any time.”*

No one Stein tried to recruit called authorities.

‘Good men’ doing ‘bad things’

Stein gave his new foursome a name: “The Crusaders” -- like the medieval Crusades, when “Muslims almost wiped out the Christians,” but this would be “Crusades 2.0,” Stein said.

The “Crusaders” were convinced that Wright’s G&G business, more than an hour away from Garden City, was beyond the reach of the FBI.

In some ways, they were right. It was another location too remote for the FBI to deploy surveillance teams, so Day’s survival was once again in his own hands when the group started meeting there in August 2016. Each meeting lasted several hours, sometimes as long as a full shift of work.

“These guys would talk about everything under the sun,” recalled Mattivi, who retired last year. “They’d talk about politics. They’d talk about football. ... But they also talked about the plot.”

“It’s gonna take a lot of good men to do a lot of bad things to turn s--- around,” Stein said at one of those early meetings. *“[But] what are those bad things that we need to do?”*

“Once we get a target, then critique it, just go from there,” Day told the group.

In meeting after meeting, Day’s recordings showed, the men struggled to pick a target, meandering through an array of possibilities: An apartment complex. A mosque. A Somali store. A bus transporting refugees. Maybe even Christian churches that are helping refugees.

They similarly waffled over how to conduct their attack, floating all sorts of ideas: Pumping poisonous gas into a building. Breaking in doors and opening fire. Setting an apartment complex ablaze. Kidnapping and raping women.

“The more we talk, the more I’m just about ready to f---ing do anything, honestly,” Stein said during one meeting at G&G.

The FBI then placed a tracking device on Stein’s pickup truck, just in case.

A manifesto like the Unabomber’s

While the “Crusaders” continued to brainstorm big ideas for an attack, Allen suggested they release a treatise with whatever they decide to do.

“I’m talking about putting out that -- what do we call that thing?” Allen asked.

A “manifest!” one of them confidently declared.

No, it’s a “manifesto,” another corrected.

“Like Brzezinski put out,” Allen blurted, confusing even himself. *“It’s not Brzezinski. What’s the other’s name?”*

“The Unabomber?” Day asked, referring to [Ted Kaczynski](#), whose decades-long bombing campaign [ended in 1995](#) with a rambling essay in the Washington Post.

“Kaczynski!” Allen affirmed. *“We’re going to try to trigger the other like-minded people across the nation to stand up and start doing the same thing we’re doing.”*

The exchange would have been comical if they weren’t discussing a deadly plot.

By mid-August 2016, with only a few months to go before the presidential election, the group was on the verge of picking a target for their attack. They were also experimenting with bomb-making materials, and about to meet one of Day's old "connections" – an undercover FBI agent posing as a dangerous criminal who could help them.

This is part 2 of a three-part ABC News series looking at one chilling case of right-wing extremism in America's heartland.

Patrick Stein, Curtis Allen and Gavin Wright, three Kansas militia men determined to kill Muslim [refugees](#) in the small town of Garden City, Kansas, spent months trying to choose a target.

They met regularly at Wright's business, G&G Mobile Home Center, rattling off possible victims, while a fourth man they recruited, Dan Day, critiqued their ideas and offered his own views.

What they didn't know at the time was that Day was working for the FBI and secretly recording the meetings.

In a series of exclusive interviews with ABC News' George Stephanopoulos, Day and his family described what they endured for months, as Day tried to stop an attack slated for the day after the 2016 presidential election. Day's story is featured in the new ABC News documentary "The Informant: Fear and Faith in the Heartland," now available on Hulu.

ABC News obtained a cache of the recordings Day made, offering a rare, real-time look at what it takes to stop a terrorist plot fueled by hatred and hysteria.

"Ask yourself, would you be willing to do what he did?" Robin Smith, one of the FBI agents who ran the case, said of Day. "Would you be willing to risk what he risked?"

'Anything that will kill and maim'

When the group's hunt for a target began, they used GoogleEarth to find potential victims.

"Drop pins every location where we know them bastards are at. ... Then print it off, you got a map," Stein said at a recorded meeting in early August 2016.

One of the locations they marked was a single-story apartment complex at 312 West Mary Street, where more than 100 people, almost all of them from Somalia, lived and even more prayed each day inside an apartment converted into a mosque there. Stein and Day had previously scoped it out.

When it's not too windy or too cold outside, the complex blooms with "people playing and barbecuing," said Ifrah Ahmed, a Somali refugee and leader in Garden City's Muslim community. "Typical American life."

One resident there was a woman in her late 50s, who was blinded as a teenager when al Qaeda-linked terrorists detonated a bomb in Somalia. Another resident was a young mother who had just given birth to a boy named Samir.

"Cockroaches," Stein called them, using his favorite term for anyone who's Muslim.

The FBI wanted Day to nudge the group to pick the apartments and mosque at 312 West Mary Street as their target. The complex was close to the FBI office, making it "easier" for the FBI to scramble there if necessary, according to agent Amy Kuhn, Smith's partner at the time. So Day promoted it.

"I'd take out that mosque," Day told the men in mid-August 2016, as his hidden device recorded. *"It's just a brick and frame building, kind of like a house."*

Eventually, the men settled on that West Mary Street apartment complex as their target.

They also finally concluded that a bombing would be best.

"We're gonna ... be putting [in] nails, ball bearings, goddamn sheet rock, knife blades," Stein said in early September 2016.

"Anything that will kill and maim," Wright added.

A crisis of conscience

Day said he constantly "struggled" with his role as an FBI informant.

He regularly worried that someone may have followed him home at night or figured him out some other way. Day said that early on, Allen had pointed a gun at him and warned, "Anybody finds out about [us], I'm gonna put a bullet in your head."

Day placed firearms around his house and adopted a pit bull as a security dog. He spoke with his family about what could happen to him, or them.

He was also in harm's way at G&G. Because the business was in such a remote area, an hour outside Garden City, the FBI couldn't send surveillance teams as backup without them being noticed.

"There was no one there to swoop in if something goes wrong," noted former federal prosecutor Tony Mattivi, who oversaw the case.

But it wasn't just the danger that daunted Day. It was also "hard" for him to spew so much hate, he said. By the time the group started meeting at G&G, Day had already spent nearly five months with them.

"I had to be like them, talk like them," Day said. "I'm not proud of it."

On one recording, when Stein touted his "cockroach theory" that to eradicate Muslims *"you can't just kill one, you gotta kill every one of them."*

Day assured Stein, *"It's going to be famous."*

Day's wife of 28 years, Cherlynn Day, said she remembers asking her husband one night: "Do you really believe them?"

"It was going on for so long and ... we were afraid that's what [he] was becoming," she said.

The FBI's 'Oh s---' moment

During a meeting inside the trailer at G&G, Wright warned the group they should try to make their own bombs, because buying explosives meant "you're gonna get set up."

For weeks, Wright and Allen tried to manufacture the explosive substance needed to set off a bigger bomb. Wright printed out nearly 1,000 pages of manuals he found online, and Allen watched instructional YouTube videos.

"They ordered stuff. They had all the materials," Day said. "They were experimenting."

Then, in mid-September 2016, Wright and Allen showed up to a meeting downright giddy. They had successfully made their own explosive, and tested it.

"I could feel the percussion of it," Wright said with a laugh. *"That was f---ing awesome."*

For the FBI and federal authorities, “That was our, ‘Oh s---,’ moment,” Mattivi said. “We had these guys saying on tape that they had manufactured an explosive. ... That was when I started losing sleep.”

Sounds ‘like a CIA setup’

The group’s plot was developing faster than the FBI expected, and Day “was petrified of continuing to work as an informant,” Mattivi said. “But he felt like there was no way he could stop.”

The FBI decided it was time to introduce an undercover agent into the operation -- someone who could “get them away from making their own explosives” and help the FBI control the plot, Kuhn said.

Under the FBI’s direction, Day told the group at G&G one day that he had ties to gun-running criminals in Oklahoma with access to “anything,” even bombs. Day had vaguely mentioned such connections to Stein months earlier, so it wouldn’t have seemed out of the blue to Stein.

“[These] guys, they’re the real deal,” Day is heard insisting in one of his recordings.

Wright liked the idea of acquiring a bomb from someone Day knew and trusted: *“That beats making it unless we have to,”* Wright said.

Allen was skeptical.

“It just sounds weird,” he said on one recording. *“It’s starting to sound like a CIA setup.”*

Stein, though, was eager to move forward with the plot, so he volunteered to rendezvous with Day’s “connections.”

The ‘bromance’

In late September 2016, Day brought Stein to the middle of another Kansas field to meet “Brian,” an undercover agent who Mattivi said looked like a “burly, bearded man’s man.”

“Well,” Brian said to Stein, *“I wanted to meet you [because] ... I ain’t gonna give it to no jihadis to go blow up people I care about.”*

“I’m, uh, glad to hear that actually,” Stein responded. *“Because that’s exactly what this is going for. ... To take [Muslims] out.”*

“I’m cool with that, man,” Brian said.

The meeting was relatively uneventful, but wildly successful. Stein and Brian hit it off even more than the FBI expected.

“They established a bromance,” Kuhn recalled with a smile.

They began texting each other almost daily about the “cockroaches,” the coming “war,” and “love of country.” They exchanged “LOLs” and “attaboys.”

Stein even revealed to Brian that he’d decided on a date for their attack: Nov. 9, 2016, the day after the presidential election in six weeks.

“[I]f we were to do this now this close to the election I am scared that it would give a lot of ammunition to the Hillary [Clinton] supporters,” Stein wrote in a text message.

“Bro, that is a great line of thinking,” Brian responded.

Stein also mentioned to Brian that he had “close to 300 pounds” of extra fertilizer on his farm.

"We could use that," Brian said, suggesting they build "vehicle-borne" bombs with it.

Stein grew gleeful at the idea of such a big bombing: *"I'd give anything to have a camera set up that would WiFi that s--- to me so I could watch it live,"* he said with a chuckle.

They agreed to meet up again in the coming days, so Stein could deliver the fertilizer to Brian.

Another 'Oh s---' moment

But then Allen's girlfriend called local police.

She accused him of domestic violence, and told police, "Oh, by the way, he's a member of a militia, and he's planning to do something," Kuhn recalled.

Unaware that the FBI had been tracking the group for months, local police scrambled to G&G and arrested Allen on domestic abuse charges. Smith briefed local officials on the federal probe.

"That's another sort of 'Oh s---' moment for [the FBI]," Mattivi said, explaining that Allen's arrest could have pushed Stein and Wright to "hurry up and commit a different act of violence," or could have at least stymied the FBI investigation.

After all, according to Mattivi, Wright warned Stein to scrap his next meet-up with Brian.

"I didn't think he'd go through with it," Mattivi said of Stein.

But then "much to my surprise, and the surprise of a few others, Patrick [Stein] actually shows up," Mattivi recalled. "That's where the bromance kicks in, because Patrick says, 'Oh, there's no way Brian's a cop.'"

The takedown

Three weeks before the 2016 presidential election, Brian and Stein met inside a local McDonald's restaurant. In the bed of Stein's pickup truck were six 50-pound bags of fertilizer, for car bombs.

"It'll be two vans," Brian told Stein. *"It's gonna make a big mess. ... I mean, I'll be honest with you, there are a bunch of kids there."*

"I'm sure there are," Stein responded.

Then Stein emphasized one thing: *"I'm putting my faith in Dan on this deal. Literally, I mean my whole life rides on it."*

When they stood up from the table and walked outside to the parking lot, a SWAT team surrounded them with guns drawn, yelling at them to get on the ground.

Moments later, an FBI team arrested Wright at his home in Oklahoma, just over the Kansas border. Allen was already in police custody for alleged domestic abuse.

When the FBI searched their homes, vehicles and offices, they found buckets of bomb making materials, a finished detonator and drafts of a manifesto.

"Don't be fooled by the words 'conspiracy theory' or 'domestic terrorist,'" one of the drafts said. "All this is a word game, 'brainwashing' by our government."

"I think most people would read that manifesto and think, 'Whoever wrote this is nuts,'" Mattivi said.

After Stein was transported to a county jail, he called his mother with an urgent message for the Kansas Security Force.

“‘Dan Day, D-A-Y, is a g---mn fed.’ ... get the message out,” Stein told his mother during a recorded call. “We were f---ing infiltrated, mom.”

What could have been

The first time FBI agents Kuhn and Smith met Stein was in an interrogation room the day of the arrests.

“I’m a patriot, bro. I love my country,” Stein told them. “You don’t give a f--- about your country.”

“The amazing thing about the United States of America, and the Constitution that we live under, is you’re entitled to that opinion, and ... I won’t kill you because you believe differently than me,” Smith responded.

The bombing in Garden City “would have completely shaken the foundation of America,” Smith, who retired last year, told ABC News.

Halima Farah was one of the Somali refugees living at the apartment complex at the time.

“If the bombing actually happened, maybe I wouldn’t be here,” she told ABC News. “And he wouldn’t be here,” she said, hugging a neighbor’s young son.

Based on an FBI analysis, Mattivi said what Stein planned “would have leveled that apartment building and almost certainly killed every single man, woman and child in it,” leaving behind a “level of carnage” potentially greater than the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, when 168 died and hundreds more were injured.

Convicted and sentenced

After a five-week trial in 2018, featuring a squad of Justice Department prosecutors and five days of testimony from their star witness, Dan Day, a federal jury convicted Stein, Wright and Allen of terrorism- and civil rights-related charges.

The jury – and more recently a federal appeals court – rejected claims by their attorneys that Day and the FBI “pushed” the men “down the path that would lead to action, arrest, and chargeable offenses,” as Stein’s attorney put it.

The attorneys also claimed that nearly \$33,000 the government paid Day, who was out of work at the time, incentivized Day to cultivate the plot. But Day strongly disputed that, telling ABC News, “I could’ve made more money working at McDonald’s.”

Mattivi said that -- considering the amount of time Dan spent as a government informant and trial witness -- “you work it out to an hourly basis [and] I’m not sure it was even minimum wage.”

Allen and Wright were each sentenced to at least 25 years in prison. Stein was sentenced to 30 years behind bars.

In handwritten letters from federal prison in Beaumont, Texas, Stein told ABC News the public is “only hearing the government’s version of things,” which “make me look as horrible as possible.”

“I’m not going to say there isn’t some truth in what you’re reading about me and the case – kinda hard to deny actual recordings,” he wrote. “What I will say is that there is a WHOLE LOT MORE to the story than has ever come out.”

He didn’t elaborate.

‘The heart of a hero’

	<p>As terrifying as his ordeal was, Day said what he went through shows “you don’t have to be friends” with people who are different, “but you don’t have to hate them” either.</p> <p>He said he has only one regret: “That [his family] had to go through the things that they did.”</p> <p>Over a game of Monopoly one night, Day’s college-age daughter told her “old man” not to regret anything, because what he did saved lives.</p> <p>“No one else had to suffer, and we’re coming out on top,” Alyssa Day said, even as she acknowledged the experience has affected her dad in “negative ways too.”</p> <p>Day believes he suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, and he said nightmares of mayhem and mangled babies still haunt him at times.</p> <p>Ahmed, the leader in Garden City’s Somali community, described Day as “one of the things that make America great.”</p> <p>“He put his family, himself, in jeopardy for us,” she said. “He saw that humanity comes first, and he saw that we were beyond what they described us to be. We were not just mere cockroaches.”</p> <p>“Dan Day is just an average guy who, when confronted with a situation that he didn’t want and he didn’t ask for, dug down deep and found the heart of a hero,” said Mattivi, who retired last year and, as a Republican, is now running to become the next attorney general of Kansas.</p> <p>Day rejected the notion that he’s any kind of hero.</p> <p>“It wasn’t just me. It was a lot of the FBI, and God,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/31 Burkina Faso: armed group kills 5 police
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/armed-group-kills-five-policemen-northern-burkina-faso-2021-10-31/
GIST	<p>OUAGADOUGOU, Oct 31 (Reuters) - Unidentified armed men killed five police officers in an attack on a police station in northern Burkina Faso in the early hours of Sunday, a government source and three security sources said.</p> <p>The incident occurred in Sourou province in the borderlands near Mali, where Islamist groups with links to al Qaeda and Islamic State have increased attacks in recent years despite international efforts to stamp them out.</p> <p>The attackers struck between 5 a.m. and 6 a.m. and stole one vehicle and eight motorcycles, the government source said.</p> <p>Islamist attacks have surged across Africa’s Sahel region, killing thousands and driving millions from their homes in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. About 1.2 million people have been displaced by the violence in Burkina Faso alone.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/31 Taliban reclusive leader rare appearance
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/talibans-reclusive-supreme-leader-appears-belying-rumours-his-death-2021-10-31/
GIST	KABUL, Oct 31 (Reuters) - Taliban’s reclusive supreme leader, Haibatullah Akhundzada, made a rare public appearance in the southern city of Kandahar, Taliban sources said on Sunday, belying widespread rumours of his death.

	<p>Akhundzada, known as the leader of the faithful or Amir ul Momineen, had not been seen in public even after the Taliban's August takeover of the country, giving rise to the speculation.</p> <p>A senior Taliban leader who was present with Akhundzada during the appearance told Reuters the supreme leader had visited Jamia Darul Aloom Hakimia, a religious school in Kandahar on Saturday.</p> <p>As the Islamist movement unveiled its interim government in September after U.S.-led forces withdrew, the mysterious Akhundzada retained the role he has held since 2016 of supreme leader, the ultimate authority over the group's political, religious and military affairs.</p> <p>Though some officials say that Akhundzada has made unpublicised public appearances before, this was the first confirmed appearance of a man who has long kept a low public profile.</p> <p>The only photo Reuters has been able to verify of him was an undated image posted on a Taliban Twitter feed in May 2016.</p> <p>This shadowy existence has led to constant speculation about his whereabouts and health.</p> <p>Previously, the Taliban had not confirmed the death of their founder, and original supreme leader, Mullah Omar, for years.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/30 Yemen: car bomb near Aden airport kills 8
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/yemeni-official-houthi-shelling-kills-children-80874781
GIST	<p>SANAA, Yemen -- At least eight people were killed by a car bomb in Yemen's southern city of Aden Saturday, officials said. The blast was the latest to hit Aden, the seat of the country's internationally recognized government.</p> <p>The explosion happened close to a security checkpoint outside Aden's international airport in the neighborhood of Khormaksar, in the afternoon, they added. At least 11 others were injured, according to the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief the media.</p> <p>The blast damaged buildings and an internet café in the area. Footage circulated online showed ambulances, sirens wailing, rushing to the site.</p> <p>No group claimed responsibility for the attack and security authorities in Aden said investigations were ongoing. Prime Minister Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed called the explosion a "terrorist attack."</p> <p>The coastal city has been rocked by several explosions in the past years, which have been blamed on local affiliates of al-Qaida and the Islamic State groups. The Iranian-backed Houthi rebels have also targeted the city with ballistic missiles and explosive-laden drones.</p> <p>Aden has been the seat of the internationally recognized government of President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi since the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels took over the capital, Sanaa, in 2014 triggering Yemen's civil war.</p> <p>The Saudi-led coalition entered the war in March 2015, backed by the United States, to try restore the government to power. Despite a relentless air campaign and ground fighting, the war has fallen largely into a stalemate, and spawned the world's worst humanitarian crisis.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the Houthis on Saturday shelled the residential Camp neighborhood on the outskirts of the government-held city of Taiz, killing at least three children from the same family.</p> <p>Moammar al-Iryani, information minister of the internationally recognized government, said at least six others were wounded, and posted graphic images showing wounded children.</p>

	<p>The government-run SABA news agency reported that the Houthis fired a howitzer round that landed in the neighborhood.</p> <p>There was no immediate comment from the Houthis.</p> <p>The shelling was the latest attack by the Iranian-backed Houthis to leave civilian casualties. On Thursday, a Houthi ballistic missile struck a residential neighborhood in the central province of Marib, killing at least 11 civilians and wounding 16 others.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/30 Taliban official: no recognition gay rights
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/10/30/britain-afghan-lgbt-refugees/
GIST	<p>LONDON — A group of LGBTQ Afghans who fled their home country have arrived in Britain, the first in a wave that London says it will evacuate, as advocates warn they have received calls from hundreds more people who fear Taliban persecution.</p> <p>The 29 people, including students and activists who spoke out about their rights in Afghanistan, are the first of many more vulnerable LGBTQ Afghans who will arrive “in the coming months,” the Foreign Office said Saturday. It did not detail how they managed to leave.</p> <p>The refugees landed Friday, just as a Taliban ministry official, appealing for the release of billions of dollars of central bank reserves, emphasized that the militants did not recognize gay rights.</p> <p>A spokesman for the Finance Ministry told Reuters that the Taliban would respect human rights and allow women to get an education within its version of Islamic law, but added: “LGBT ... That’s against our sharia law.”</p> <p>Afghanistan’s new leaders, who seized control in August, want foreign governments to “just give us our own money,” he said as the country grapples with a battered economy and rising hunger.</p> <p>While some aid has trickled in, the United Nations warns the country is on the verge of a starvation crisis, and experts say untangling terrorism sanctions on the militants that limit aid would be tricky.</p> <p>The United States and European nations have frozen key sources of funding, wary of Taliban promises that it has changed its harsh ways. During its previous era in power, from 1996 until 2001, those who broke the rules, not least women and gay men, could face execution.</p> <p>In a massive military operation — marked by violence and harrowing images — U.S. troops, British forces and their allies airlifted more than 100,000 people by late August, and have since helped others leave, though they acknowledge that many did not make it out.</p> <p>Afghans worried about reprisal for working with Western forces or for their human rights work scrambled to flee as the evacuation ended with the withdrawal of U.S. forces after 20 years of war. Those who remained include people who identify as LGBTQ who fear punishment for their sexual orientation or gender identity in a country where some had already felt unwelcome.</p> <p>Rainbow Railroad, a Canadian LGBTQ charity that helped Friday’s new evacuees escape along with British rights group Stonewall, said it had fielded more than 700 requests for help and identified at least 200 people who need immediate rescue from Afghanistan. It also called on the Canadian and U.S. governments to step in to help get more people out.</p> <p>“These 29 people faced grave and immediate threats to their lives because they are LGBTQI+. ... They will begin to resettle and rebuild their lives in the country,” it said. “However, it is only the beginning.”</p>
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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	10/30 Modern cyclones rainiest in centuries
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/tree-rings-show-modern-cyclones-rainiest-in-centuries/
GIST	<p>TROPICAL CYCLONES LIKE Hurricane Ida can cause severe flooding, producing disruptions, damage, and loss of life. Like many other types of weather, tropical cyclones and hurricanes on the US East Coast have become more extreme over the past several decades. Although there is some controversy over the extent of the increase in intensity, there is evidence that such storms are moving more slowly than in the past. This slower movement causes storms to last longer and produce more rain. However, because conventional weather records only go as far back as 1948, it's unclear how unusual these slow-moving cyclones are compared to earlier weather patterns.</p> <p>A recent study addresses this question by using tree rings to reconstruct hundreds of years of seasonal cyclone precipitation levels. The studied trees, some over 300 years old, show that precipitation extremes have been increasing by 2 to 4 millimeters per decade, resulting in a cumulative increase in rainfall of as much as 128 mm (5 inches) compared to the early 1700s. The greatest increases have occurred in the past 60 years, and recent extremes are unmatched by any prior events.</p> <p>Beyond establishing these reconstructed historical records, researchers are working with these data sets to improve forecasts of what this region might expect in the future.</p> <p>Good for Growth—At Least for Trees</p> <p>In an earlier work, Justin Maxwell and his collaborators found that longleaf pine trees on the East Coast of the US could act as indicators of tropical cyclone precipitation, as measured by the trees' late season (June to October) growth bands. These smaller, more local studies indicated that recent precipitation levels were far greater than anything the trees had experienced earlier in their lifetimes.</p> <p>That's an unexpected finding, since tree-ring records generally show evidence of extreme weather scattered throughout their history, although the frequency may vary. The discovery prompted the new study, which checked whether this pattern held over a wider area.</p> <p>"Often, tree-ring reconstructions show us that the extreme climate we have recorded with instruments (weather stations) over the last 120 years was surpassed back in time," Maxwell told Ars Technica. "Our past research showed that recent extremes were unmatched in the past—all the highest values are mostly since the 1990s, which was a big surprise, and that encouraged us to sample a broader area to see if this increase was local or present over a larger region."</p> <p>Combining existing data sets with two new locations, the researchers included trees from a total of seven sites across North and South Carolina. Within North America, this region receives the most rain from tropical cyclones, and it also has the world's most complete record of this type of precipitation.</p> <p>The new data sets included a selection of samples from 13 to 36 old-growth trees per site (taken in a way that caused minimal damage to the trees), as well as stumps. The researchers' next step was to calibrate their model by comparing tree ring patterns to known rainfall measurements from 1948 to the present.</p> <p>Reconstructing the Past to Predict the Future</p> <p>As might be expected, tree rings are more representative of seasonal rainfall than of the frequency or extremity of individual storms. But the growth patterns clearly suggested less cyclone season precipitation in centuries gone by.</p> <p>A year with a lot of rain doesn't necessarily mean a giant storm passed through. "[It] could represent rainfall from one hurricane, or it could've been multiple hurricanes," wrote Maxwell. "What we found in this paper is that this area is receiving more tropical cyclone precipitation for the entire season."</p>

	<p>While researchers in the field are still debating the cause, many have suggested that it's related to the trend of storms moving over the area more slowly.</p> <p>Worldwide, cyclones' translational speeds have decreased by as much as 10 percent in the last 70 years due to weakening global wind currents. "This [increased precipitation] is because hurricanes are hanging around one area longer than they used to," Maxwell explained.</p> <p>The team is expanding its historical reconstruction by including samples from across the southeastern US. The study's coauthor, Joshua Bregy, is also collaborating with other experts to explore whether these reconstructions can be used to help project what we might expect from future cyclone seasons.</p> <p>"Based on our current knowledge of the global climate system, in a warmer world, global winds will be weaker, and we are seeing this happen already," said Maxwell. "If warming continues, as is predicted, these global winds will continue to be weak. Global winds are what steer tropical cyclones, so having weaker winds leads to more meandering storm tracks and stalled storms in one location, producing more rainfall. Therefore, these large seasonal totals of tropical cyclones are likely to continue into the future."</p>
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HEADLINE	10/31 UN: uncharted territory world's climate
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/oct/31/were-in-uncharted-territory-for-the-worlds-climate-un-says
GIST	<p>The climate crisis has driven the planet into "uncharted territory", with far-reaching repercussions for today's and future generations, according to the UN World Meteorological Organization. It said the Cop26 summit was a "make-or-break opportunity to put us back on track".</p> <p>The WMO's State of the Global Climate report shows that the last seven years have been the hottest seven years on record, and that accelerating sea level rise hit new heights in 2021. It also sets out the heatwaves, wildfires, droughts and floods that have wreaked havoc across the planet this year and is intended to inform Cop26 negotiations.</p> <p>"The report shows our planet is changing before our eyes," said the UN secretary general, António Guterres. "From the ocean depths to mountain tops, from melting glaciers to relentless extreme weather events, communities and ecosystems around the globe are being devastated. Cop26 must be a turning point for people and planet.</p> <p>"Scientists are clear on the facts," he said. "Now leaders need to be just as clear in their actions. The door is open; the solutions are there. We must act now, with ambition and solidarity, to safeguard our future and save humanity."</p> <p>"Extreme events are the new norm," said Prof Petteri Taalas, the WMO secretary general. "Cop26 is a make-or-break opportunity to put us back on track."</p> <p>Taalas set out the climate impacts. "It rained rather than snowed for the first time on record at the peak of the Greenland ice sheet. A heatwave in Canada and parts of the US pushed temperatures to nearly 50C in a village in British Columbia. The exceptional heat was often accompanied by devastating fires," he said.</p> <p>"Months' worth of rainfall fell in the space of hours in China and parts of Europe saw severe flooding, leading to dozens of casualties and billions in economic losses. A second year of drought in sub-tropical South America reduced the flow of mighty river basins and hit agriculture, transport and energy production."</p> <p>On Monday, 120 global leaders will arrive at Cop26 in Glasgow after a battery of reports were released that spell out the grave danger the world is in. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's report</p>

was a “code red” warning, according to Guterres, and found that global heating was [unequivocally caused by human activities](#) and affected every part of the planet.

UN reports have also found that the action plans of the world’s nations so far leave the planet facing a catastrophic 2.7C of heating. Emissions are on track to be [16% higher in 2030](#) rather than 45% lower, which is the cut that science shows is required to keep below 1.5C and avoid the worst consequences. Planned production by the world’s governments of fossil fuels, the key cause of the climate emergency, [“vastly exceeds” the limit](#) for 1.5C.

The WMO report shows that the rise in the world’s average temperature has exceeded the landmark figure of 1.0C above pre-industrial levels over the past two decades, the first time that a 20-year period has surpassed this threshold since records began in 1850.

“This fact will focus the minds of delegates at Cop26 aspiring to keep within the limits agreed in Paris six years ago,” said Prof Stephen Belcher, the UK Met Office chief scientist. The report said 2021 would not be the single hottest year on record, because of a natural climate phenomenon called La Niña, which is temporary.

A WMO report published last week showed that the levels of [climate-heating gases in the atmosphere hit record levels](#) in 2020, despite coronavirus-related lockdowns.

More than 90% of the heat trapped by greenhouse gases is soaked up by the oceans, and the new WMO report said seven global datasets project new record sea temperatures this year. The oceans also absorb about a quarter of humanity’s carbon emissions, which has pushed the seas to their most acidic in at least 26,000 years.

It said the average sea level rise was 2.1mm a year from 1993 to 2002, but 4.4mm a year from 2013 to 2021, mostly the result of accelerating loss of ice from glaciers and ice sheets. Prof Jonathan Bamber at Bristol University’s glaciology centre said: “If we continue on our current trajectory, that rise could exceed 2m by 2100 and displace some 630 million people worldwide. The consequences of that are unimaginable.”

An exceptionally hot and dry summer in 2021 in western North America took a “brutal toll” on the region’s mountain glaciers, the WMO said. Prof Andrew Shepherd at the University of Leeds said: “2021 is now the 30th consecutive year in which Antarctica and Greenland have together lost ice, and there is no sign of this abating. It’s a shocking record.”

The report also recorded extreme temperature records in 2021. The 54.4C recorded in Death Valley, in the US, in July is the highest in the world since at least the 1930s, while the 48.8C in Sicily, Italy, in August is a provisional European record. Many regions in North America and Europe suffered major wildfires.

The Pacific north-west heatwave “would have been [virtually impossible](#) without climate change”, scientists found, and the flooding in western Europe was made up to [nine times more likely by the climate crisis](#).

Prof Hannah Cloke at the University of Reading said: “I only hope that at Cop26, the facts [in the WMO report], which summarise the fates of millions of people, are foremost in the minds of the world’s political leaders.”

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HEADLINE	10/31 Fife police: suspicious device is real bomb
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article255438866.html
GIST	A suspicious device that led to the evacuation of area businesses and road closures turned out to be an actual bomb, Fife police announced via social media Sunday afternoon.

	<p>The department confirmed the device was a bomb and that the Pierce County bomb unit had disabled it about 5:30 p.m.</p> <p>Around the same time, police lifted the evacuation order and reopened roads in the area of 54th Avenue East and 20th Street East. Police first learned of the suspicious device about 4:30 p.m., according to social media. Drivers were alerted to avoid the area.</p> <p>Police continue to investigate the incident.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/29 Calif. city plagued by extraordinary stench
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/oct/29/carson-california-canal-smell
GIST	<p>Lakesia Livingstone was driving back to her home in Carson, California, in early October after watching her son play football when she was hit with an overpowering stench. “It was like a rotten egg smell, horrible, very strong,” Livingstone says. “I thought, oh my God, something is going on.”</p> <p>That smell has now lasted four weeks, creating chaos for residents of Carson, a city in Los Angeles county. The extraordinary stink – which has been described as “the stench of death” – is coming from a nearby canal where authorities say decomposing vegetation is sending off plumes of hydrogen sulfide gas.</p> <p>The Carson city council has declared a local state of emergency, but frustrated residents say it’s taking too long to fix a problem that’s more than a nuisance – it’s making them physically unwell.</p> <p>“It’s not just an odor. An odor does not make you physically sick, with headaches, respiratory problems, and rashes,” says Ana Meni, a lifetime Carson resident who worked for the city for 25 years.</p> <p>Livingstone has also experienced health problems. When she’d take walks in the evening, which she does to combat high blood pressure, she experienced pounding headaches, fatigue and nausea. She would lose her appetite and sleep for 10 hours straight. Her symptoms got so bad that she went to her doctor for anti-nausea medication. The doctor told her: “You’re going to have to get out of there if you’re feeling so badly.”</p> <p>The county is working to fix the problem, and says the gas levels are starting to decline. They are aerating the canal, known as the Dominguez Channel, injecting oxygen into the water and spraying deodorizer on the canal to reduce the stench.</p> <p>So far, the city of Carson, along with LA county, has relocated more than 1,300 residents, including Meni and Livingstone, to hotel rooms. Hundreds more have left the area on their own dime, Meni says.</p> <p>She says it took her a few days after leaving Carson to realize how groggy she had been, running fans all the time to try and keep the smell out of her home. “My voice is a little froggy, I have my throat tightening up, even now. I don’t have medical coverage, my breathing isn’t normal,” she says.</p> <p>Meni is running for city clerk, and the election is next Tuesday, but she has been focusing on meeting with displaced residents and organizing through a Facebook page that now has 3,300 members. Residents in the group have likened the smell to “the stench of death” and “The Walking Dead”.</p> <p>“The way this is going, we are not getting clear answers other than they are bringing the smell down,” she says. “I could be sitting next to a toxic dump, and if you Febreeze it to death, you take the smell away, but it’s still toxic.”</p> <p>Cleanup efforts under way</p> <p>County officials say they were first notified of a foul odor coming from the Dominguez Channel, a 15.7-mile-long (25.2km-long) river that catches storm drains and empties into the Port of Los Angeles, on 7 October. A team discovered decomposing material in the canal and activated an emergency management team.</p>

“Our water sampling tells us our efforts are working,” Mark Pestrella, the director of Los Angeles county public works told a virtual town hall on Wednesday night. “So we are ramping up and making good progress at and seeing a downtrend in the sulfur hydrogen sulfide that’s creating this odor.”

However, it’s still not entirely certain what is causing the persistent stench. Inspectors are looking into the possibility that an earthquake in mid-September shook something loose from a refinery or other industrial plant in the area.

Meni was angry to hear city officials blaming the smell on nature alone. “We call BS on that,” she says. “I have lived here 42 years, and everyone says: ‘We have never experienced this.’ Please do not say it’s nature. That cannot be.”

Hydrogen sulfide, also known as sewer gas, is a colorless gas known for its pungent odor at low concentrations. It is extremely flammable and highly toxic, but Muntu David, an LA county health officer who spoke at Wednesday’s town hall, assured residents that the levels people are breathing are too low to cause permanent damage.

He added that the Environmental Protection Agency determined that you would need to be exposed to about 27,000 parts per billion (ppb) for an hour straight, or 17,000 ppb for eight hours straight, to be at risk for permanent or irreversible ill health effects.

“Although some outdoor one-hour average readings in the air occasionally reached as high as 7,000 ppb, these levels have been transient and fleeting and occurred mostly at night,” he said. “During the day, outdoor readings have consistently come down and lately have been hovering in the 1,000 ppb or less range, which most people can easily smell.”

‘Why are we still getting sick?’

But residents are still worried and frustrated. Last week, the Los Angeles county department of public health recommended that residents avoid prolonged outdoor activities between the hours of 9pm and 8am and reduce exposure whenever odors are strong. Schools in the area were told to have discretion when considering outdoor activities, and residents have been told to keep their pets indoors.

Carson is home to predominantly people of color, and residents feel like the response to their crisis hasn’t been as rapid as to other environmental issues in the area, such as the recent oil spill in Huntington Beach, an upscale beach community. “I follow the Huntington Beach spill because I hike there sometimes,” says Livingstone. “That was cleared up in a matter of a week and a half. But that channel is not as big as the beach. So why haven’t we received the resources we need?”

Asked about residents’ complaints that resources aren’t being fairly distributed, Kerjon Lee, a communications manager from the Los Angeles county public works department, says the response efforts have come from multiple agencies and began immediately after the smell was first reported.

“We are focused on the bacteria that’s digesting the organic material that’s within the channel,” Lee says.

Meni says that areas where people of color live tend to have minimal or no environmental policies in place. The lack of transparency and accountability has left her with more questions than answers. “They are telling us one thing, that the levels are low, but our bodies say something else. Why are we still getting sick?”

She’d like to be able to go home to Carson, but she says she’ll wait until the headaches stop. “It’s really scary, and we don’t know how long it will be.”

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HEADLINE	10/29 Hurricane season fizzling out early?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/29/us/hurricane-storm-season.html

The waters across the Atlantic Ocean have been mostly calm. There hasn't been widespread panic to buy plywood, sandbags or generators in weeks. The National Hurricane Center's [Twitter account](#) hasn't shared an active-storm message for the Atlantic since Oct. 9, and there have been no warnings or threats along the Gulf Coast and East Coast since.

Is hurricane season fizzling out early?

"Nope. We're not done yet," Dennis Feltgen, a meteorologist and spokesman for the National Hurricane Center, said on Thursday, adding that hurricane season doesn't officially end until Nov. 30.

In May, scientists predicted an ["above normal" Atlantic hurricane season](#), with 13 to 20 named storms. The National Weather Service [later updated that forecast](#) to 15 to 21 storms, including seven to 10 hurricanes. That followed the record-setting 2020 season, [when there were 30 named storms](#), including 13 hurricanes.

But as of Friday, only 20 named storms had come and gone, leaving just Wanda on a list of names created by weather officials. The last major hurricane was [Sam](#), which formed in late September and strengthened into a Category 4 storm as it crossed the Atlantic. It never posed a serious threat to land and dissipated nearly two weeks later. The last named storm was Victor, a tropical storm that [broke up on Oct. 4](#) after churning across the eastern Atlantic. It has been relatively quiet since.

"The most favorite areas for development in October are the Gulf of Mexico and the northwestern Caribbean Sea," Mr. Feltgen said. "The water temperatures there are warm enough to support a tropical cyclone, but it's too much wind shear in the area. Nothing could get going, let alone sustain itself. That's a good thing!"

Predictions suggest the quiet streak may continue for at least the next week or two, Mr. Feltgen said, but he noted recent activity in the Pacific Ocean, including Hurricanes [Pamela](#) and Rick, which both struck western Mexico this month.

Philip Klotzbach, a meteorologist at Colorado State University, [said on Twitter](#) that only twice since 1995 had the Atlantic had no named storm activity from Oct. 6-26, in 2006 and 2007.

A string of storms over the summer battered parts of North America:

- [Hurricane Grace killed at least eight people](#) after making landfall on the eastern coast of Mexico in August.
- Later that month, Ida [slammed Louisiana](#) as a Category 4 hurricane, and its remnants then moved up the East Coast, causing [deadly flooding in the Northeast](#) in early September. The storm killed dozens of people, most of them in Louisiana, New Jersey and New York.
- Larry struck Canada as a Category 1 hurricane in late September, causing widespread power outages in Newfoundland before [bringing snow to parts of Greenland](#).

The links between hurricanes and climate change have become clearer with each passing year. Data shows that [hurricanes have become stronger worldwide](#) during the past four decades. A warming planet can expect stronger hurricanes over time, and a higher incidence of the most powerful storms — though the overall number of storms could drop, because factors like stronger wind shear could keep weaker storms from forming.

Hurricanes are also becoming wetter because of more water vapor in the warmer atmosphere; scientists have suggested storms like [Hurricane Harvey in 2017](#) produced far more rain than they would have without the human effects on climate. Also, rising sea levels are contributing to higher storm surge — the most destructive element of tropical cyclones.

"Looking ahead we still have to go through the end of November and we typically can see something pop up in the month of November, so we're not calling the season yet," Mr. Feltgen said.

	<p>Storms that develop late in the season can be equally unpredictable, he said, and November storms have been known to hit both the Gulf and East Coasts.</p> <p>Mr. Feltgen warned residents not to be lulled into a false sense of security by the lack of recent storm activity.</p> <p>“Remain vigilant, check in every once in a while and see what’s going on in the tropics,” he said. “Don’t raid your hurricane supplies yet.”</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 How corruption ruined Lebanon
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/28/magazine/corruption-lebanon.html
GIST	<p>The head of Lebanon’s Central Inspection Board, Judge Georges Attieh, stood in his mother’s fourth-floor apartment, his childhood home in Beirut, and pushed open a new, white window shutter. A sharp winter chill stole into the room, bare except for a neat stack of gray cinder blocks. A few steps away, a damaged piano covered in a floral sheet was surrounded by a jumble of objects: broken dining chairs, cardboard boxes, a clothes steamer, rolled-up rugs. Attieh looked out at the flat blue sea visible between the few buildings that separated his mother’s apartment from the Port of Beirut. “I haven’t been here in six months, even though I drive by here every day,” he said. “I can’t. I’m unable to come here. It isn’t easy.”</p> <p>The last time he was there, on Aug. 4, 2020, he had just rushed from his office across town to rescue his mother and his younger brother Joseph. At 6:08 p.m. that day, a portion of some 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate, recklessly stored at Beirut’s port since 2014, suddenly exploded. A fertilizer often used as a component in improvised explosive devices had been stockpiled within walking distance of residential neighborhoods.</p> <p>Joseph captured the blast in a 15-second video, which Attieh showed me on his cellphone as he stood in front of the window where it was recorded. The old shutters, visible in the footage, were green. In the video, a column of light gray smoke froths and bubbles into a bright blue sky — the initial fire in the port’s Hangar 12, where the ammonium nitrate was stored. Joseph’s prayers to the Virgin Mary are interspersed with pleas to his mother to move away from the window. In the smoke, small bright lights flash, as tons of fireworks stored alongside the hazardous material pop. An abrupt, ferocious burst of fiery black orange shoots into the sky, and then a white mushroom cloud rises as Joseph cries out to the Virgin Mary one last time before the video cuts. He was flung into an adjacent apartment through what moments earlier had been a wall.</p> <p>The explosion was one of the largest non-nuclear blasts in history. It killed at least 216 people (the exact figure is unknown) and injured more than 6,500. It left hundreds of thousands homeless and damaged 85,744 properties. Attieh’s mother and brother survived, but between them they needed about 100 stitches. Nineteen people from their neighborhood weren’t so lucky. Their names are memorialized across the street on a stone plaque bordered by red geraniums.</p> <p>More than a year later, not one person has been held responsible for a peacetime explosion that harmed more people than any single violent episode in Lebanon’s long, troubled history. A handful of senior political, judicial, security, military and customs officials — including President Michel Aoun and former Prime Minister Hassan Diab — all knew that volatile materials were stored at the port and did nothing to remove the danger. A judicial investigation is underway, but few Lebanese expect it to identify the culpable and deliver justice, not because they don’t trust the investigative judge but because they fear political interference. In December 2020, the first judge charged Diab, along with three former ministers, with negligence. All refused to appear, claiming immunity. The judge was removed for “bias,” following complaints from two of the ministers. Similar attempts were made to remove the second judge, Tarek Bitar. Those failed, but the political establishment — especially the Shiite group Hezbollah and its allies — has continued to try to dismiss Bitar, spawning violent protests this month that left at least six people dead. (As of press time, he was still in charge.) Many Lebanese are calling for an independent international investigation.</p>

The Port of Beirut is overseen by a hodgepodge of government and security agencies with overlapping mandates. Technically, the port falls under the Ministry of Public Works and Transportation and the Ministry of Finance, as well as a body established in 1993 with a mouthful of a name, the Temporary Committee for Management and Investment of the Port of Beirut. Despite its “temporary” status, it is still in operation — though very little of what it does is subject to any scrutiny. It does not publish financial statements, and its board is appointed by the country’s political leaders. A host of civilian entities operates at the port within the various government ministries and committees, in addition to security and intelligence agencies, including the Lebanese Armed Forces. “The very design of the port’s management structure was developed to share power between political elites,” [Human Rights Watch wrote in an August 2021 report about the blast](#). “It maximized opacity and allowed corruption and mismanagement to flourish.”

The Beirut explosion was one of the ugliest manifestations of everything that has gone wrong with Lebanon since the end of the 15-year civil war in 1990, an indictment of a postwar system that has enabled a handful of politicians to dominate and exploit every facet of the state. The country has collapsed under the burden of concurrent crises that were decades in the making: a financial and economic implosion, grinding political deadlock, the Aug. 4 blast. In [October 2019, tens of thousands of Lebanese across the country took to the streets in protest](#), fed up with the mismanagement and arrogance of their leaders. “All of them means all of them!” was the battle cry. Lebanon’s October Revolution was met with force and fizzled. And then came the coronavirus pandemic.

The Lebanese are now [struggling to survive one of the world’s worst economic meltdowns](#) of the past 150 years, a crisis the World Bank has called a “deliberate depression” perpetrated by a feckless ruling class. More than 70 percent of the population of a once-middle-income country now lives in poverty. The local currency has lost more than 90 percent of its value. In 2019, the Lebanese woke up one day to learn that the banks had locked them out of their accounts, leaving depositors unable to retrieve their rapidly depreciating funds. Triple-digit hyperinflation has taken hold. Food prices alone have increased 550 percent since 2019. Unemployment is soaring, businesses are closing and the country is hemorrhaging tens of thousands of people to emigration. Power outages can last for days. Internet services have become intermittent, and there are shortages of medications, from over-the-counter painkillers to cancer drugs, in a country once called the Hospital of the East. Hours- and even days-long lines for staples like bread and gas have become the norm.

The country has been driven to bankruptcy by a handful of politicians, most of whom began as sectarian warlords. The power-sharing agreement that ended Lebanon’s civil war produced a cross-sectarian political system — much like the one the United States imported into Iraq after the 2003 invasion — that has looted the state and weakened its institutions.

Attieh knows this better than most. The institution of which he is the head, the Central Inspection Board, is the country’s main investigative agency, responsible for keeping tabs on public services and funds. But his inspectors are forbidden to scrutinize many key state and state-affiliated bodies, including the Port of Beirut. These are the red lines that Attieh cannot cross. He wants to erase them.

As Attieh told me when surveying the repair work in his mother’s home: “There shouldn’t be a person or an administration dealing with public funds that isn’t subject to oversight.”

Attieh didn’t apply to head the Central Inspection Board. Like others in many senior civil-service positions, the judge was appointed by Aoun. Attieh, a 44-year-old father of three who has taught law at Université Saint Joseph for almost two decades, had been a judge for 17 years in various low-level courts, dealing with traffic infringements and civil disputes, when he got a call to meet the president in the spring of 2017. (Attieh says he didn’t know Aoun and is not a member of his political party, the Free Patriotic Movement.) Five days later, he was head of the agency.

He walked into a disorganized, understaffed bureaucracy with little in the way of digitized records. There were no administrative links among the Central Inspection Board’s eight departments, each of which is

headed by a general inspector. Only three general inspectors were on the job when Attieh took over; the others had retired. Within a few months, two more retired and Attieh was left with only one.

Attieh cannot hire or fire personnel. That privilege belongs to the cabinet and to the sectarian political leaders, who stack government ministries and public institutions with loyalists. The cabinet sent Attieh a list of names, which were not chosen from within the Central Inspection Board as required by law. Attieh refused to sign off. Finally, after about six months, the cabinet relented. It was Attieh's first win. "I felt like, whoa, 30 years of accumulated corruption," he said. "It's like a mountain in front of me, and I have small, small tools to chip away at that mountain."

Attieh asked for more people and greater powers but has not received either. In total, the number of inspectors on his team is less than half of the 106 he is allowed by law, a figure set in 1959 during Lebanon's heyday of institution building. Back then, there were about 13,000 civil servants. Today Attieh says the number is at least 10 times that — closer to 20 times if you include the military and security services, whose finances also fall under his purview — but he is still allowed only the set number of inspectors. The 1959 law has been amended not to increase personnel but to exclude bodies from the Central Inspection Board's oversight. "This all happened after the war," Attieh said. "For 30 years, the regulatory oversight and control bodies weren't supported. It means you're inviting chaos and a lack of oversight into the public administration, and that's what happened."

Attieh knows that his department, like most public institutions, is riddled with moles, appointees who are working in the interest of certain politicians. Over the years, competency requirements were eliminated in favor of the right sectarian background, not just in Central Inspection but across much of the public sector. A clientalist system rooted in the concept of *muhassassa*, or the allocation of positions based on sectarian quotas rather than merit, became entrenched. Political leaders determine who is hired, enabling them to carve out private fiefs inside state institutions by doling out jobs to their followers. Citizens with *wasta*, or pull, have the advantage, even if there are still many clean and competent public servants. Attieh himself faces criticism because he, too, is a political appointee. "If they can read properly, they'd see how straight my work is," he told me. "I don't bend for politics or religions."

Attieh frames his task as a "mission," not a job. His monthly take-home pay of 6.7 million Lebanese pounds, \$4,466 before the currency crash, is now worth less than \$340 at ever-changing black-market rates. It's not much for a family of five, although it's a lot more than many are making these days. The minimum monthly wage, once \$450, is now about \$34. Attieh says he's dipping into his inheritance to make ends meet. He was born into money, the eldest of four sons whose parents had a textile business and provided uniforms to Lebanon's security services. Attieh remembers the civil war and its hardships, particularly the economic crash of 1987 caused by a sharp depreciation of the currency, a mirror of today's catastrophe. "All the money my father had, all of his millions, melted," Attieh recalled. "He used to tell me, 'Look at how thugs have become rich, and the rich and people who worked hard for their money have become destitute.' So I felt at that time that there was no justice, and it was all unfair." Attieh was only 11, but it was not long after that he decided to pursue law.

Attieh was just two weeks into his new job when his father was hospitalized with lymphoma. He died within months. "I'm bitter about it," Attieh said. "I'd been by his side for 40 years, and that year I left him. I had just accepted this position and was trying to build momentum." Attieh says he turned down job opportunities in the Persian Gulf that came with five-figure monthly salaries because his father once scolded him, saying, "You put a price tag on your mission?" Although born in France, Attieh does not have French citizenship and the guaranteed exit plan that comes with it. His father refused it, Attieh said, "because he didn't want to provide an easy route for us to emigrate. My only option is to fight to find a way to make this a better country for my children and others."

Attieh's Central Inspection Board has two main operational methods: surprise inspections and the investigation of complaints, though whistle-blowers have few protections. "The legal mechanism says that a person has to complain about their supervisor through their supervisor," Attieh said. "It needs to change. The complaints should come directly to Central Inspection, and if that happens, managers will fear their employees."

For now, Attieh's powers extend only as far as a ministry's general manager. "Ministers are not under our supervision," Attieh said. "I can't hold a minister accountable. I can't investigate ministers." Ministers can and have forbidden their employees to cooperate with Attieh's inspectors, going so far as to kick inspectors out of the Ministry of Public Works and Transport, for instance, the same ministry that shares responsibility for the port. It was closed to Central Inspection by four consecutive ministers (including two charged in the initial port-blast investigation) — until Attieh pushed his way in. Among other things, Attieh's inspectors were investigating claims that roadwork contracts were awarded based on dividing the same road into chunks as if each were a separate project. "They'd contract every 100 meters to somebody for 75 million Lebanese pounds, just below the amount that requires auditing," Attieh explained, so that the projects could be awarded at the minister's discretion and escape oversight. "The minister at the time issued an order to not cooperate with us. I replied on Twitter. I told him, 'Your orders are illegal!'" On that occasion, he added, "I broke them."

Lebanon's dysfunction can be traced directly to the country's post-civil-war system of governance. When the war ended, a new government was forged not out of an attempt to reckon with the toll of death and destruction, but by burying the past under a 1991 amnesty law that paved the way for sectarian warlords to become sectarian political leaders. (The Shiite Muslim group Hezbollah was the only party to retain its weapons because it was engaged in armed resistance to Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon.) The amnesty law helped enshrine unaccountability at the state's highest levels.

Lebanon's sectarian system, which predates the war, divides positions among the country's 18 officially recognized sects. The president must be a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim and the speaker of Parliament a Shiite Muslim. The system was designed to ensure that every community's voice is heard in a country riven by factionalism, but it has enabled sectarian leaders to avoid accountability by claiming that any criticism of them is really a criticism of their sect.

The power-sharing deal that ended the civil war is known as the Taif Agreement. Among other things, the Taif Agreement (named after the Saudi city where it was negotiated) divided Parliament, the cabinet and senior civil-service positions equally between Christians and Muslims (eliminating a prewar Christian advantage). This sectarianism was supposed to be temporary, but more than three decades after the agreement was signed, it is still deeply entrenched, and some of the Taif Agreement's many other provisions, like decentralization and the creation of a Senate, have not been implemented.

Hussein el-Husseini, the 84-year-old former parliamentary speaker who is known as Abu Taif, or the father of the Taif Agreement, told me at his home in Beirut that implementing Taif would mean "their role will end." Every Lebanese knows whom he means: the half dozen or so men who have called the shots in Lebanon since the end of the civil conflict. "I named them the company of five," el-Husseini said. "A bunch of thieves, a company of five that has ruined us."

There's Nabih Berri, the leader of the Shiite Amal Movement militia turned party, who has been parliamentary speaker since 1992. The Druse chieftain and former warlord Walid Jumblatt, head of the Progressive Socialist Party. The Maronite Christians' Samir Geagea, the leader of the Lebanese Forces militia turned party. And Geagea's wartime and peacetime rival, the current president, Michael Aoun, a general who commanded part of the Lebanese Army that split along sectarian lines during the war. And finally, the Sunni billionaire businessman and former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. "He was the godfather," el-Husseini said. Hariri was assassinated in 2005 and succeeded by his son, Saad, the political heir of the Future Movement party. A company of five plus one — Hezbollah, which first entered government in 2005.

"Every one of them has a statelet within the state," as well as foreign patrons, said el-Husseini, who led the negotiating committee in Saudi Arabia. "They want a state without institutions and a country without citizens." Some are allied to the West and its Saudi ally, others to the East, as part of Iran's "axis of resistance," while Aoun and Jumblatt have toggled between the two. All are embroiled in larger regional agendas that trap Lebanon in the Middle East's many disputes. El-Husseini went on: "As long as they are present, there is no reform, because any reform will lead to their disappearance."

The militia leaders' ways of doing business also transitioned into the postwar system. Militia-related financial networks, including ownership of banks, have become politician-aligned financial networks and banks. Dr. Jad Chaaban of the American University of Beirut found that, in 2014, eight political families controlled 29 percent of the banking sector's assets. As Attieh told me, "Here, everything is a conflict of interest."

Shared goals can trump political differences. Riad Kobaissi, an investigative journalist with Lebanon's Al Jadeed television channel who has looked into corruption at the port since 2012, told me that every major political party has its people at the port. Even political rivals "can coordinate when it comes to Mr. Benjamin Franklin" — a \$100 bill — "he is the guy who can solve any problem in Lebanon."

Over the years, Kobaissi and his colleagues have revealed how, for the right price, shipping containers entered or exited the country without proper inspection; containers were stolen and passed through the port's security checkpoints; hefty fines vanished or were markedly reduced with a bribe. Of the 25 or so customs officers at the port responsible for inspecting containers, 16 were caught taking bribes in footage Kobaissi broadcast. All kept their jobs, even after eight were prosecuted and some were imprisoned. "Until now, until now, they are still serving in their positions at Beirut harbor! Till now!" Kobaissi said. "You're asking me how there was an explosion in the port? This is how."

Overhauling a system of enmeshed political, financial and sectarian interests is a formidable task, one that Kobaissi believes "is stronger than the explosion," and stronger than Attieh's well-meaning efforts. Kobaissi, who hosts the television show "Bring Down Corrupt Rule," has on occasion called Attieh live on air to grill him about various scandals, only to seem surprised that Attieh was also investigating them. Still, he doesn't think Attieh is "bold" enough to take on the system. "I'm not saying he's a bad person, but he's not the profile of the person who is needed," Kobaissi said. "I'm talking about having a Central Inspection body that makes their knees shake. That's how you make a state!"

When I met Hassan Diab in May at his office in the Ottoman-era hilltop Grand Serail, he was waiting for a new government. Diab had been prime minister for a total of six months when the blast occurred; he and his cabinet resigned days later. He had now been the caretaker prime minister for nine months and counting, and would become the longest serving caretaker in Lebanon's history. "God knows when it will end," he said. "I'm waiting. I'm sad, I'm angry, because the Lebanese people are paying the price for these delays." In March, Diab threatened to stop work to exert pressure on sectarian power brokers to form a government. They didn't budge. "They lost their sense of shame a long time ago," he told me. "I've tried everything. What more can I do?"

Lebanon has been paralyzed with caretaker governments for more than three of the past 10 years, in what Diab said he considers the surest sign that "the political system has failed." Collective decision-making means that progress can hinge on whether one sectarian leader is speaking to another. "Every leader tells his supporters that the blame is on the Other, and then he sits with the Other" in national unity governments, Paula Yacoubian, an independent member of Parliament who resigned after the explosion, told me. "It's a joke."

A political outsider, Diab served as education minister for a few years and was a professor of computer engineering and vice president of the American University of Beirut for decades. He says he was undermined and obstructed "from Day 1" because if his government "succeeded in uncovering just a fraction of the corruption, it would expose part of this corrupt class. They didn't want that to happen." I asked him for names and examples. "It's not like I have a list that I don't want to give you," he said. "It's not a joke to say that this person is corrupt. It shouldn't be the prime minister or ministers who say that — the judiciary should decide that," he said. "I knew there was corruption, but I didn't imagine it was so rooted, and I knew we would face confrontations, but I didn't think it would be this much."

Diab has his own history with the judiciary. This August, Bitar, the judge leading the port investigation, subpoenaed Diab and others charged in connection with the explosion. Diab, who had given an affidavit to Bitar's predecessor, has refused to appear for questioning as a suspect. Sunni religious and political leaders

quickly rallied around him. Lebanon's grand mufti, the top cleric for Sunnis, described the charges as an attack on "the office of the prime minister." (The other suspects have similarly sought cover from religious and sectarian leaders.)

I put it to Diab that he hid behind his sect like an old-school sectarian politician. "I'm not hiding behind anything — I'm saying I abide by the Constitution," he said, "and the Constitution says if you want to accuse a prime minister, you do it in the Parliament."

The Constitution stipulates that ministers and heads of state can be tried only in a court formed by the Parliament — a body that has never been activated. Ziyad Baroud, a former interior minister, election-reform campaigner and legal expert, told me that the parliamentary special court was built into the system "to avoid accountability. Why do ministers need to be judged before a special court?" he said. "They are not special people."

Diab insists that the charge against him was politically motivated and that he was a scapegoat. "I knew of it" — the ammonium nitrate — "on July 22, about 10 days earlier, and some people knew about it for seven years. So was it a political decision or not?"

Attieh, like Baroud, doesn't believe that ministers should be tried in a special court. "When a minister is performing his duties, he should be investigated directly by the judicial courts," Attieh said. No public servant at any level "should be politically protected from being held accountable." To make this possible, he strongly supports calls to strengthen the judiciary.

Although on paper the judiciary is an independent body, in practice it is subordinate to the political ruling class, in part, because the High Council for the Judiciary, an administrative body responsible for overseeing the judiciary, is financially dependent on the executive. Eight of the council's 10 members are chosen by sectarian leaders via the cabinet. The other two are elected by judges. "There is no revolution unless the judiciary as an institution is involved," Marie-Claude Najm, the former justice minister, told me in her office in March.

Najm, a lawyer and professor at Beirut's Université Saint Joseph, supports a bill, still pending in Parliament, to grant the judiciary independence. It is not the first attempt to break the political establishment's hold over judges. In April 2018, cracks in the judicial body appeared with the formation of the Lebanese Judges' Association, a group established against the wishes of the High Council, which fought its formation for years. I met Judge Amani Salameh, then the head of the group, along with two of her colleagues, Judges Bilal Badr and Faysal Makki, at a cafe in early spring. "We crossed a million lines," Salameh told me. "We are the black sheep in the judiciary."

The three judges, who are all in their 40s, explained how politicians can influence judges by appointing them to important courts or keeping them in lowly ones, or by denying them perks like lifetime positions on lucrative judicial committees that can supplement a judge's income by as much as two or three times their salary. The Judges' Association members I talked to said they want all 10 members of the High Council to be elected by their peers. About 90 of Lebanon's 550 judges have so far joined the association, which faces stiff resistance within the judiciary. In April, Salameh was hailed a public hero when, after a complaint from a group of depositors, she ordered the seizure of all assets of Lebanese banks and their chief executives. The order is on hold while the banks maneuver to remove Salameh from the case. It's "the same way that's used with Judge Tarek Bitar, to have the judge changed," she said. The association is "hammering away at a rock with a needle," she added. "We have a deep state," Makki, who now heads the group, said. "You cannot change 30 years in three years."

Perhaps nowhere is that clearer than in the financial sector. In April 2020, Diab's administration approved an economic recovery program based on negotiating with the International Monetary Fund for assistance, while also drafting reforms to unlock international aid predicated on anti-corruption measures. Diab's cabinet estimated that the central bank's losses alone amounted to roughly \$50 billion and called for equitably distributing the burden of those and other losses, including among creditors and bank shareholders. Predictably, representatives in Parliament, acting in the interests of the banks, scuttled the

plan, insisting the losses were much lower (contradicting reports of the I.M.F.'s own estimates), and the banks proceeded to push the debt off themselves and their shareholders and onto regular citizens by severely reducing the value of their deposits. Talks with the I.M.F. collapsed because the Lebanese could not agree on the size of the financial losses.

Diab's plan also included a forensic audit of the central bank, the Banque du Liban, which among other things is tasked with safeguarding the country's monetary and economic stability. Riad Salameh, who has been the bank's governor since 1993, enjoyed worldwide acclaim, including for his so-called financial engineering. It basically worked like this: Commercial banks offered double-digit interest rates for new term deposits and then lent that money to the central bank, which then lent it to the government. The arrangement, which even the French president Emmanuel Macron called a "Ponzi scheme," relied on banks sucking in new money. The share of public debt held by banks amounted to more than 40 percent. From 1993, when Salameh assumed his position, to 2018, the banks' net profits increased 3,000 percent to \$2 billion.

The high interest rates on bank deposits encouraged a rentier economy that disincentivized investment in industry and agriculture. Hala Bejjani, the former managing director of Kulluna Irada, a civic organization for political reform, told me that the signs of Lebanon's financial doom were "obvious" but that leaders didn't care to see them. She and a team of development specialists, economists and finance experts met with senior politicians, including the president, in March 2020, to warn of an impending financial implosion and suggest ways to avert it. "It's a recipe, like making a cake," Bejjani said of the plans. "They were all absolutely shocked at what we were telling them," Bejjani said, "because this is the job of Riad Salameh. They were each focused on their fiefs."

Salameh has refused to answer many of the questions submitted by the foreign auditing firm Alvarez & Marsal, selected by Diab's cabinet, citing a 1956 Banking Secrecy Law. Najm, the former justice minister who has been one of the fiercest proponents of a forensic audit, railed against Salameh's claims that public funds were subject to the banking secrecy law, which had to be lifted for a year before an investigation could proceed. "There's no need, and it's a dangerous precedent," she said, "because it gives you the idea that you can't do any audit without each and every time lifting the law." Attieh, who attended cabinet sessions about the forensic audit, pushed for auditing not just the central bank but all of the state's ministries, a recommendation that was not adopted.

Salameh is currently being investigated by Swiss and French authorities for amassing hundreds of millions of dollars, allegedly through embezzlement and money-laundering schemes. He denies any wrongdoing. The French president has said that Lebanon's ruling class used its ties to banks to transfer funds abroad during the financial crisis. Many Lebanese, including Michel Daher, an entrepreneur and first-time member of Parliament who tried and failed to introduce a capital-control law in 2019, want the international community to reveal the foreign bank accounts of Lebanese politicians. "If people are starving and their political leaders have billions of dollars overseas and are selling them slogans," Daher said, "people will turn on them."

A new Lebanese government headed by Najib Mikati was formed in September, and in October it restarted the forensic audit of the central bank and talks with the I.M.F. The Saudis and their gulf allies, meanwhile, have withheld aid that would help dig Lebanon out of its deep hole, largely because of Hezbollah's powerful role within the state and its strong ties to their regional nemesis, Iran. The West has also said that aid will be predicated on reforms and anti-corruption measures, a condition it has made and ignored in the past.

To people like Kobaissi, it's clear that Western nations are "liars when they say they want to fight corruption" in Lebanon. If they were serious, he told me, "they would support accountability and regulatory bodies." According to the Gherbal Initiative, a civil-society organization founded in 2018 that researches state contracts, foreign loans and grants, foreign states have often poured money into hazy schemes that never materialize. Assaad Thebian, Gherbal's 33-year-old executive director, gave me a typical example: multiple foreign loans over the years, totaling some \$200 million, for the same

wastewater project that was never executed. “If you still believe that you can trust the same warlords to take new aid money in order to fix the problems, you’re delusional,” he said.

Although both pro- and anti-Western sectarian leaders and their acolytes remain deeply embroiled in various domestic corruption scandals, to date only Hezbollah and its allies have been internationally censured. The United States has imposed sanctions on a number of Hezbollah members and affiliates for corruption, as well as several of Hezbollah’s allies from other parties. Hezbollah and its supporters consider the sanctions political. “So now the Americans and French have woken up to the corruption?” said Hussein Hajj Hassan, a Hezbollah member of Parliament. “Ah, OK, I didn’t realize that they didn’t know before.”

Some Lebanese blame Hezbollah for the port blast, accusing it of having a connection to the ammonium nitrate and of stockpiling weapons at Hangar 12, which made it a target of an Israeli airstrike that set off the port explosion. (Israel denies the allegation.) Hezbollah’s detractors also claim the ammonium nitrate at the port was destined for its ally, the Syrian regime, for so-called barrel bombs. Hezbollah, for its part, denies any connection to the fertilizer or the blast, maintaining that the substance was stockpiled by Lebanese on the other side of the political spectrum who are opposed to President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, to be used by al-Assad’s opponents in their improvised explosive devices.

The blast aside, detractors say that Hezbollah is more responsible than the company of five for eroding the state’s authority, because it has established a powerful ministate within the state, backed by its weapons. I put it to Hajj Hassan that a weak state suits Hezbollah. “A strong state is impossible with this system,” Hajj Hassan told me.

“The weakest thing in it is the state,” added Ibrahim Moussawi, Hajj Hassan’s colleague and fellow member of Parliament. “The sects are stronger than the state. It’s that simple.”

Against this backdrop, Attieh’s plans to strengthen the state may seem somewhat modest. But they are significant in a country where opacity is the order of business: He is trying to digitize procedures to enable the kind of transparency and tracking that would make anti-corruption investigations easier — or even perhaps prevent wrongdoing in the first place. His aim is to create an interlinked data-based system across public institutions, municipalities and ministries so that policy decisions can be based on collectible data that is shared with the public, not a politician’s opinion or private side deals. It is an ambitious project in a country that hasn’t held a census since 1932 (an effort to sidestep the thorny question of sectarian demographics).

Attieh has developed and implemented Lebanon’s first e-governance platform, known as Impact, which connects public institutions and citizens. It requires administrations to upload and share data in order to, say, geographically map Covid-19 cases, allowing people to register for coronavirus vaccinations as well as receive the permissions required to leave home during the multiple extended lockdowns that Lebanon imposed. Attieh says that in the first three weeks of Impact’s lockdown-permissions portal, it received eight million requests from two million people — this in a country of about five million Lebanese and some 1.5 million Palestinian and Syrian refugees. Impact has “modernized the way we live,” Attieh said. “Tell me, doesn’t all of that reduce wasta?”

Impact is “a corrective change,” as Attieh puts it, in other ways too. “If a person is going to write something, and you know that paper will be posted somewhere, you make sure it’s right,” he said, adding that he has informed ministers that Impact is publicly posting their decisions. “We are not just collecting data,” he said. “We are creating a new awareness, a new reality for citizens, a new way of doing things.”

Attieh wants to extend Impact so that citizens can make appointments in ministries and with other public bodies and know beforehand how much a procedure costs and what paperwork is required to complete it. That way, he said, “nobody can ever again say: ‘Oh, I can’t find the file. It fell down some crack’” until a bribe is paid.

For a man keen on digitizing data, Attieh has an office stacked with paperwork. He worked through Lebanon's many extended lockdowns, going to the office twice a week, often staying well into the night. He has a habit of speaking quickly, as if he can't get his ideas out fast enough, switching thoughts mid-sentence to get another point into the conversation. He is bursting with plans. He wants to introduce an internal auditing unit in every ministry and have it report directly to Central Inspection. He is working on a draft law to oblige anyone who deals with public funds or is in a public position, including ministers, to be subject to Central Inspection's oversight. He and his team are formulating a comprehensive five-year road map for administrative reform, based on the more than 3,000 recommendation letters that he has sent to ministries and other bodies. "Our recommendations are ignored — it's a problem," he said, leafing through piles of manila folders as he read out some of his many recommendations. He drowns administrators who ignore him with monthly follow-up letters, which has prompted some, including ministers, to at least acknowledge his correspondence, if not to act on it. Attieh also formally notes in writing when "a minister does something illegal," so that the minister knows that he's keeping score. "I felt like I was planting 100 kilograms of seed, and only one kilogram would sprout," he said. He needs just one thing to put his plans in action: "a government that will empower us," he said. "If a new government doesn't cooperate with us, for sure we will fail."

Instead, one of the first things the new Mikati government has done is demand that Central Inspection receive the prime minister's permission before investigating any public institution. "It's not legal," Attieh said of the decision, a point he relayed to Mikati in person. The prime minister, he said, was responsive and talks are continuing. Attieh is not deterred. "I'm not working with the attitude of an employee who is afraid of losing his position."

The next parliamentary elections are scheduled for spring 2022. Civil rights organizations and activists involved in the October Revolution are mobilizing to stand for seats, but first they must unite and agree to a common platform. They face a system that changes the electoral law ahead of every poll, by amending the size and boundaries of electorates, for instance, to suit the main political parties. "We are champions in gerrymandering, really champions," Baroud, the former interior minister, told me. Still, the longtime electoral-reform campaigner believes that this time, "whatever the law, change is coming," and that the cry of the October Revolution, "All of them means all of them," should really be "All of us means all of us."

Attieh agrees that change doesn't just mean ridding the system of corrupt politicians and judges and the public servants who do their bidding. "Bribes require a briber and somebody who accepts that bribe," he said. Attieh recalled an anti-corruption demonstration in front of his office during the October Revolution. He said he recognized a man in the crowd who was leading the chants. He had once tried to make a traffic fine disappear in Attieh's court, claiming *wasta* through a connection to a politician. Attieh reminded the young man of his actions, telling him, "If you want to fight corruption, start with yourself."

For Attieh, Lebanon faces nothing less than a battle for its destiny. "There is a move to rebuild the temple in the same way that we are now rebuilding the walls of our family home," he said. Attieh hasn't been back to his mother's apartment since that one visit in February. It still pains him to go there. The apartment remains empty. "I can't afford repairs," he said. Although "every day, things are getting worse in this country," Attieh hasn't lost hope. "I'm an optimist, because otherwise I would pack my bags and leave. There is no middle ground. We either leave, or we work toward reform."

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HEADLINE	10/29 Skagit Co. warns: fake pills deadly fentanyl
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/health/counterfeit-prescription-pills-contain-fentanyl-methamphetamine-skagit-county-health/281-96b2818c-13fa-4c4d-aa1f-4058e432ac52
GIST	<p>The Skagit County Health Department is warning of a sharp increase in counterfeit prescription pills containing potentially deadly doses of fentanyl.</p> <p>Fentanyl is a powerful synthetic opioid 50 times more potent than heroin and 100 times more potent than morphine, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p>

	<p>In September, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) put out a Public Safety Alert warning of an increase in the availability of lethal fake prescription pills containing fentanyl and methamphetamine.</p> <p>The DEA found that two out of every five pills laced with fentanyl contain a possibly fatal dose of at least two milligrams.</p> <p>Some of the most common counterfeit pills are made to look like prescription opioids such as oxycodone (Oxycontin, Percocet) and hydrocodone (Vicodin), alprazolam (Xanax), or stimulants like amphetamines (Adderall).</p> <p>Counterfeit prescription pills are widely available and easy to purchase. Pills are often sold online through social media, making them accessible to anyone with a smartphone, including teens and young adults, according to the DEA.</p> <p>Fentanyl was linked to 67% of overdose deaths in Skagit County so far in 2021, according to health department data. In 2020, fentanyl was linked to 36% of overdose deaths. Washington state overall is on track to have a record amount of overdose deaths linked to fentanyl in 2021, according to the state department of health.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/29 Bomb cyclone hit trees still full of leaves
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/bomb-cyclone-winds-stressed-pacific-northwest-trees-early-this-year-while-still-full-of-leaves/
GIST	<p>Tom Hinckley kicked through leaves on a sopping morning at the Washington Park Arboretum.</p> <p>The rain made the trees' autumn colors shine with wet, and their trunks dark as lead set in glowing stained glass.</p> <p>Lovely as they are, all those leaves still on the trees can spell trouble in storms that have hit with unusual strength so early in the fall, said Hinckley, professor emeritus at the University of Washington School of Environmental and Forest Sciences.</p> <p>Windstorms can be far more damaging to trees when they come, as the "bomb cyclone" that hit last weekend did, while leaves are still thick on the trees.</p> <p>In this most recent howler, winds on the coast gusted into the 50 mph range and even topped 70 mph just over the Washington border near Astoria, Oregon, on Sunday. Inland, gusts were clocked at 40 to 50 mph from Boeing Field to the San Juan Islands, said Mary Butwin, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service in Seattle.</p> <p>The Olympic Peninsula was soaked with 5 inches of rain from midnight Saturday to midnight Tuesday. Nearly 8 inches of rain fell in the southeastern Olympic Peninsula.</p> <p>It <i>is</i> starting to be the season for these storms to blow in. But the recent ruckus was on the earlier side, Butwin said. Thanksgiving weekend usually marks the beginning of the windstorms here.</p> <p>The combination of lots of rain, microbursts of wind and leaves is a doozy; trees are not built for that kind of punishment.</p> <p>"When the leaves are on, the canopy acts more like a sail; it catches the wind," said Dave Bayard. He is in charge of what utility Seattle City Light calls its "veg management unit" — the crews who deal with trees in the path of power lines.</p>

“We get a lot more damage when the leaves are still on,” said Bayard, adding that the year-after-year drought has also been taking its toll on the trees, limiting their ability to grow wood to reinforce stress points.

“They only have so much they can put into their defenses, and that is a trend we have been seeing for a number of years.”

Trees can be surprisingly shallow-rooted, with roots spreading wide, rather than deep, in a big pancake in the top inches of the soil.

This makes sense from the tree’s perspective. Most of the nutrients are in the top level of the soil, in the leaf litter and minerals, and a vasculature of fungal threads that carry moisture and nutrition from tree to tree.

However, that also means that when soils are either saturated with rain already, or still powdery from drought, a rushing sky river of wind and rain can be a recipe for damage.

Trees are marvels of engineering, built to take a life of abuse while, well, rooted in place.

The late [Steven Vogel](#), biologist, biomechanics pioneer and longtime professor at Duke University, spent his career analyzing how leaves manage wind and sun.

He discovered in wind-tunnel experiments chronicled in his book [“The Life of a Leaf”](#) (Chicago, 2012) that leaves and pine needles are engineered to cluster and curl in the wind, to reduce the forces of drag. But trees are built for ordinary, not extraordinary risks.

There also always is more to how a given tree will respond in a storm than meets the eye in that moment.

Trees are scribes of their environment, their wood and growth responding to all that goes on around them over time.

Like people, each tree’s version of history will be a little different. There are commonalities in any one place, but trees respond to events as individuals, reflecting their specific site and life story.

“They have all this history built into them; when a tree falls over it’s a combination of the moment now, and its history,” Hinckley said.

Tree failure can be catastrophic. A woman and her 22-year-old son were [killed by a falling tree Sunday](#) as they drove on Preston-Fall City Road.

The bomb cyclone was so extreme it caused tree and power line damage the utility is still cleaning up. Broken branches are hung up in trees, just waiting to shake out in the next storm.

“There were localized pockets of pretty intense wind bursts,” Bayard said. “You take a tree that is accustomed to bending a certain amount and you force it to do much more, and that is when you get a failure.”

But if anything, Bayard said, he is amazed at what trees can take.

“It is amazing to watch this 100-foot cottonwood, branches all akimbo, moving 30, 40 feet, side to side. For the most part, stuff stays put.

“It is worth taking a second look around at how much really tall trees did not blink at this, because of how they move.”

	<p>The oldest trees have had to master a tremendous amount of environmental change, including the loss of management regimes practiced by the first peoples of the region, Hinckley noted.</p> <p>Development also has created fragmented, patchy groves, where there once were forests in which acres of trees could buttress one another in the wind.</p> <p>New plantings in subdivisions never put on the strength they need if left staked, or sheltered from the wind by buildings.</p> <p>Like people, trees must endure adversity to get strong. Trees will push food to an area that is stressed to put on additional wood just where it is needed — but the signal to do so is induced by movement in wind.</p> <p>“It toughens up at the stress point. They depend on wind to have girth,” Hinckley said.</p> <p>Another atmospheric river is flowing overhead this week. But it is much weaker than the last one, with breezy winds forecast to back down to gusts of 20 mph or so by Friday.</p> <p>Nothing out of the usual tempest for these parts, Butwin said.</p> <p>“Just regular fall.”</p>
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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	10/31 Moses Lake drive-by shooting; 2 arrests
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/injured-teen-suspect-arrested-with-brother-after-drive-by-shooting-police-say/YVQNN7GSKBE53E5SMR7NNDQAQYU/
GIST	<p>MOSES LAKE, Wash. — A 15-year-old boy was injured and arrested with his 17-year-old brother after a drive-by shooting Saturday morning in Moses Lake, police said.</p> <p>According to the Moses Lake Police Department, at around 10 a.m. officers were called to the 300 block of Earl Road for a report of shots fired.</p> <p>When police arrived, the victims told police that as he drove away from his home, he saw a gold Cadillac parked across the street, authorities said. The Cadillac then pulled away and passed in front of the victims and drove onto Grape Drive and then to Earl Road.</p> <p>The victims told police they also turned onto Earl Road, headed to a nearby home and did not know the people in the Cadillac, according to police. The Cadillac then stopped in the middle of the road and the victims told police they drove around the vehicle and saw a gun point out of the driver’s side window.</p> <p>According to police, the victims said a person in the back seat of the Cadillac began to shoot at their vehicle and that is when one of the victims returned fire in “self defense” and struck one of the persons in the Cadillac.</p> <p>Shortly after the shooting, a 15-year-old arrived at Samaritan Healthcare with a gunshot wound to his leg, police said. However, before investigators arrived at the hospital to question the teen, the shooting suspect was released.</p> <p>It was not until early Sunday that the 15-year-old and his 17-year-old brother surrendered themselves and were arrested at their home in the 2200 block of Basin Street after a warrant was served, according to authorities. The gold Cadillac, which had bullet holes in the side, was seized.</p> <p>The teens were booked on two counts of first-degree assault and drive-by-shooting.</p>

HEADLINE	10/31 Police: arrest; 2yr-old kidnapped, killed
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/police-arrest-man-after-2-year-old-kidnapped-killed
GIST	<p>VANCOUVER, Wash. - Vancouver police arrested a man early Sunday morning after he allegedly kidnapped and killed his 2-year-old child.</p> <p>Police responded around 12:50 a.m. to a report of threats. A woman reported that the father of her 2-year-old had picked up the child Saturday evening and later called her making threats to harm the child, Vancouver police said in a news release.</p> <p>Police said they believe the child was killed in Gresham, Oregon, the Columbian reported.</p> <p>The department issued an Amber Alert around 2:30 a.m., requesting help in locating the suspect vehicle, a silver 2018 Mitsubishi Outlander with Washington license plates. Police warned people not to approach the vehicle if it was spotted.</p> <p>Police later contacted the suspect, who agreed to turn himself in. He was taken into custody around 4:15 a.m. The child was found dead, the police statement said. The department has not released the suspect's or child's names.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/31 Police: man intentionally drove car in crowd
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/us/california-man-accused-of-plowing-into-crowd-after-argument-with-woman-report
GIST	<p>LOS ANGELES--Police in Southern California said they arrested a man accused of intentionally driving his car into a group of people in Long Beach after an argument with a woman.</p> <p>Richard Dalton Irigoyen, 27, is accused of driving his car onto a sidewalk and striking six people, KTLA reported. A woman he had an argument with was one of the victims, police said, according to the report.</p> <p>Fox 11 reported that the suspect is accused of fleeing the scene at about 2:43 a.m. Sunday. The incident occurred at the end of a Halloween party, police said. The report said those injured included five adults and a juvenile. They were listed in stable condition.</p> <p>The KTLA report said Irigoyen faces six counts of attempted murder and assault with a deadly weapon. His bail was set at \$6 million, the report said.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/29 International Maritime Operation arrests
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/transportation/international-maritime-operation-finds-terrorists-among-tourists/
GIST	<p>An international operation aimed at strengthening passenger controls at a number of seaports and airports linking North Africa to Southern Europe has yielded 29 arrests for a variety of offenses, including one on terrorism charges.</p> <p>The individual concerned, arrested in Algeria, was subject to an INTERPOL Red Notice for terrorism activities. An additional 24 terrorism-related hits based on checks in INTERPOL and national law enforcement databases were identified throughout the operation.</p> <p>Led by INTERPOL with the support of the World Customs Organization (WCO) and Frontex, Operation Neptune III involved law enforcement in five countries – Algeria, France, Italy, Spain and Tunisia – and</p>

was carried out during the summer 2021 tourist season. The operation was supported by funding from the INTERPOL Foundation for a Safer World.

INTERPOL deployed officers to assist local authorities in screening travelers, cross-checking their data against INTERPOL and national databases. The WCO deployed two officers in Italy and France to assist local Customs services, collected information on all Customs seizures and ensured that data were effectively shared between Customs services through its secure communication platform, CENcomm. Frontex, the European Union's Border and Coast Guard Agency, deployed officers in Italy and France to assist local authorities in profiling passengers, identifying document fraud and detecting illicit activities.

Tens of thousands of vehicles and passengers cross international borders via maritime routes every year. Traffickers and terrorists regularly take these routes, compromising regional security across Europe and Africa. Operation Neptune III produced the following results:

- Arrests: 29 individuals were arrested on charges of terrorism, drug trafficking, vehicle theft, crimes against children, sexual violence, fraud and human trafficking, among other crimes.
- Seizures: 17.5 kg of cocaine, with an estimated street value of EUR 1.2 million; more than 20,000 ecstasy pills; 189 kg of tobacco products; five vehicles (three luxury cars and two motorcycles); one handgun and 29 hunting rifles; over EUR 260,000 in cash.

"The results of Operation Neptune III show that suspected terrorist and organized crime groups are moving through the same borders as thousands of other passengers each month," said INTERPOL Secretary General Jürgen Stock.

"However, the results also demonstrate that securing borders through enhanced international law enforcement cooperation presents an opportunity to disrupt terrorist threats and criminal operations," the Secretary General added.

INTERPOL's databases contain details of around 135,000 individuals suspected of terrorist activity, making the organization the largest repository of such information. Data is collected from and shared with law enforcement in INTERPOL's 194 member countries.

Operation Neptune III saw officers from participating member countries conduct systematic screenings of individuals and their passports at selected seaports and maritime operational zones.

Terrorism and organized crime are often transnational by nature, making cross-border information sharing between law enforcement agencies critical to ensuring front-line border officers can screen individuals using the most complete information available. While the screening of passengers constitutes a routine procedure, the potential consequences of border officers' decisions can sometimes be a matter of life and death.

Frontex supported the operation in partnership with Italy and France as part of its multipurpose operations at sea borders. The agency concentrated on Mediterranean seaports and the movements of suspected terrorists using established ferry routes between the EU and North African countries.

Four Frontex experts were deployed at sea ports in Italy and France to assist with border checks, screening and profiling of suspected terrorists, preventing unauthorized border crossings and detecting cross-border crime.

The experts also supported local authorities with the identification of document fraud. On the ground, Frontex experts held information sessions on how to spot suspected terrorists on the move and on the latest document fraud trends.

Customs administrations participating in the operation strengthened controls on passengers and their belongings, targeting especially the smuggling of currency and weapons. They shared information with each other on any seizures made during inspections of passenger baggage, vessels and vehicles.

	The Tunisia Customs Service seized 29 hunting rifles that had been concealed inside a vehicle that had departed from Genoa, Italy, on a ferry bound for Zarzis, on Tunisia's southeastern coast. Italian Customs and the Guardia di Finanza made numerous seizures of tobacco products, stolen electronic goods and over 2,000 items of counterfeit designer clothing, while French Customs seized 93 kg of tobacco from a single individual.
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HEADLINE	10/31 Chinatown International District shooting
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/two-hospitalized-after-shooting-in-chinatown-international-district/
GIST	<p>Two men were transported to Harborview Medical Center after a shooting just before 5 p.m. Sunday in the Chinatown International District, according to the Seattle Police Department.</p> <p>A 911 call came in at 4:55 p.m. reporting a shooting on the 1200 block of South Jackson Street; police arrived and found two men — one age 35, one 40 — who'd both been shot in the leg. Officers applied tourniquets and when Seattle Fire Department medics arrived, medics took the men to Harborview for treatment.</p> <p>Both men were in stable condition Sunday evening, Seattle police wrote on the Police Department's blog.</p> <p>"Several witnesses provided differing suspect descriptions," the police blog said, but didn't provide what they were. "Police searched the area but did not find anyone matching those descriptions."</p>
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HEADLINE	10/31 Report: FBI failed to act on Jan 6 tips
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/oct/31/capitol-attack-fbi-washington-post
GIST	<p>The FBI and other key law enforcement agencies failed to act on a host of tips and other information ahead of 6 January that signaled a potentially violent event might unfold that day at the US Capitol, the Washington Post reported on Sunday.</p> <p>Among information that came officials' way in the weeks before what turned into a riot as lawmakers met to certify the results of the presidential election was a 20 December tip to the FBI that supporters of Donald Trump were discussing online how to sneak guns into Washington to "overrun" police and arrest members of Congress, according to internal bureau documents obtained by the Post.</p> <p>The tip included details showing those planning violence believed they had orders from the president, used code words such as "pickaxe" to describe guns, and posted the times and locations of four spots around the country for caravans to meet the day before the joint session.</p> <p>On one site, a poster specifically mentioned Mitt Romney, a Republican senator from Utah, as a target, the Post said.</p> <p>Romney was later one of seven Senate Republicans who voted to convict Trump on one charge of inciting an insurrection, leveled by the House of Representatives during a second impeachment of the former president.</p> <p>An FBI official who assessed the tip noted that its criminal division received a "significant number" of alerts about threats to Congress and other government officials. The FBI passed the information to law enforcement agencies in Washington but did not pursue the matter, the Post said.</p> <p>"The individual or group identified during the assessment does not warrant further FBI investigation at this time," the internal report concluded, according to the Post.</p>

	<p>That detail was among dozens included in the report, which the newspaper said was based on interviews with more than 230 people and thousands of pages of court documents and internal law enforcement reports, along with hundreds of videos, photographs and audio recordings.</p> <p>A special congressional committee is investigating events which exploded into violence after a rally Trump held near the White House to rail against the results of the election, which he lost to Democrat Joe Biden.</p> <p>Four people died on 6 January, one shot by police and the others of natural causes. More than 100 police officers were injured, one dying the next day. Four officers have since taken their own lives.</p> <p>More than 600 people have been charged with taking part in the violence.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/29 Jan 6 concern: Antifa, BLM 'blending in'
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/oct/29/police-officials-exchanged-warnings-antifa-black-l/
GIST	<p>Newly revealed documents show that law enforcement officials were concerned that far-left activists would “attempt to blend in” with Trump supporters at Jan. 6 protests and “cause trouble especially around cameras.”</p> <p>In a Jan. 5 email, a U.S. Capitol Police Intelligence and Interagency Coordination Division official alerted several federal and police agencies to a Twitter post about Antifa and Black Lives Matter protesters from Baltimore and Washington “already busing people in to disturb January 6th.”</p> <p>The email went to the U.S. Park Police, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Transportation and Washington Metro Police Department. It was among 300 pages of U.S. Park Police records related to the Jan. 6 riot that were obtained by Judicial Watch through a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit.</p> <p>“Orders given to dress like ‘MAGA’ blend in cause trouble especially around cameras,” read the Twitter post that was shared by the USCP intelligence official. “At night arson has been ordered. All to be blamed on Trump supporters attending.”</p> <p>In the email, the official told law enforcement colleagues that the post had received “multiple replies” saying that BLM and Antifa activists “will wear MAGA hats backwards, wear camouflage and attempt blend into the MAGA crowd.”</p> <p>During and after the Jan. 6 riot, news outlets including The Washington Times reported that activists from leftist organizations had been present in the crowd that stormed the Capitol.</p> <p>While law enforcement identified far-right extremists in the crowds, no Antifa or other far-left activists were identified. The Times issued a correction for its erroneous report.</p> <p>However, the emails confirm that the possibility of agitation by leftist activists was on the radar of law enforcement officials as they prepared for the protests. In the emails, the officials do little to assess the credibility of the tweet.</p> <p>“This guy’s Twitter says he’s a US Senate candidate for MD in 2022,” the email reads. “He retweets a lot from Lin Wood.”</p> <p>The account that posted the tweet referenced by the officials has since been suspended.</p> <p>Law enforcement officials were also concerned about the possibility of counterprotestors clashing with pro-Trump demonstrators on Jan. 6, according to a U.S. Park Police Incident Briefing the day before.</p>

The incident briefing note, which also was obtained in the FOIA lawsuit, outlines several rallies scheduled to take place throughout the day and details the number of anticipated attendees for each rally gleaned from social media posts.

The report identified the Women for America First's "March for Trump" featuring President Trump and members of his family as keynote speakers as a potential flash point.

"This group has significant potential to attract counter-protesters, similar to events in November and December 2020," the report reads.

"Multiple acts of violence have occurred in the downtown Washington, D.C. area during and after similar events hosted by the same organizer."

A Capitol Police spokesperson told The Times that the email exchange alone does not indicate that the officials found the claim credible. "Intelligence and law enforcement agencies across this region receive a lot of tips about social media chatter," the spokesperson said.

"There is no indication the information in that online chatter ended up being credible."

"We don't have proof ANTIFA was on-site on 1/6," the spokesperson said. "ANTIFA was not among the dozens of people who were arrested on 1/6."

Utah resident John Sullivan, who sold riot footage from inside the Capitol to new outlets for upward of \$35,000, was later arrested for being inside the Capitol. He has described himself as a Black Lives Matter supporter and founder of Insurgence USA, which Utah-based Deseret News described as "a social justice group ... that calls itself anti-racist and protests police brutality."

Mr. Sullivan says he was acting as an independent journalist on Jan. 6 and has denied any affiliation with Antifa. Prosecutors noted that he was not affiliated with a news outlet and did not have press credentials on Jan. 6.

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HEADLINE	10/31 Brazil police kill 25: planning a bank heist
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/31/world/americas/brazil-police-kill-25-bank-gang.html
GIST	<p>BRASÍLIA — The police say an operation against a gang planning bank robberies killed at least 25 suspects in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais on Sunday.</p> <p>The Military Police said that the group had planned to attack financial institutions over the All Souls holiday. It said the operation, conducted along with Federal Highway Police, led to seizure of "a real arsenal of war," including .50-caliber machine guns, rifles, explosives and bulletproof vests.</p> <p>The agencies gave few other details.</p> <p>Large-scale bank heists have become more frequent in recent years in Brazil, with hostages sometimes used as human shields. In August, bank robbers armed with explosives and high-powered rifles terrorized a city in São Paulo state, marching hostages down a street and strapping some to their cars as they made their escape.</p> <p>In December, large gangs of bank robbers raided cities in two part of the country, again seizing hostages and overwhelming police garrisons.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/31 UK police struggle with sexual misconduct
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/31/world/europe/uk-police-sexual-misconduct.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=World%20News

LONDON — James Mason was on duty in a North London police station when a young woman came in to report that she had just been mugged on a city street. Already shaken, the woman became even more unnerved by Mr. Mason's questions: What clothes did she wear to work? Did she have a boyfriend? Would she like to go to dinner?

When she contacted him asking for case updates, he continued to aggressively pursue her. And when she told him he was out of line, he replied in an email, "Actually, coming on to victims is positively encouraged," adding: "It's all part of the friendly and accessible face of the Met Police. It's the rejection that's frowned upon."

Mr. Mason would rise through the ranks of London's Metropolitan Police Service, eventually becoming a detective chief inspector, while the young woman remained silent about the 2011 episode, saying in an interview that she did not feel empowered to come forward until last year.

At a disciplinary hearing last month, in which the woman was granted anonymity, Mr. Mason was found to have engaged in gross misconduct for abusing his power as an officer for a sexual purpose. Rather than being dismissed, though, Mr. Mason was [given a final written warning](#) this month, a ruling that shocked his victim but reflected what criminal justice experts describe as a systemic failing within Britain's police forces as they struggle to control or discipline employees who abuse women.

In August, a former Northumbria police officer [was sentenced](#) on charges of indecent assault and misconduct for an exploitative sexual relationship with two domestic abuse victims. This month, [a Nottinghamshire police officer was dismissed and barred from service](#) after sending sexually suggestive messages to a woman he pulled over while driving. Also this month, a disciplinary panel found that a London police officer's sexual relationship with a woman he was investigating for a crime constituted [gross misconduct](#).

This type of behavior by officers has prompted outrage among women, rights groups and politicians across Britain, reaching a pinnacle in September after the sentencing of Wayne Couzens, a London police officer who [abused his position to kidnap, rape and murder Sarah Everard](#).

The police have acknowledged missteps in vetting Mr. Couzens — who received a life sentence — leading to wider concerns that forces nationwide were not doing enough to identify and stop offenders in their ranks.

The young woman pursued by Mr. Mason — who requested that her name be withheld because she has previously been attacked online — said she felt the police were more concerned with preserving Mr. Mason's career than her safety. "They shouldn't be protected," she said in the interview.

Mr. Mason, who apologized at his disciplinary hearing, retained his position as detective chief inspector. Efforts to reach him through the Metropolitan Police were unsuccessful.

Around 2,000 policing staff nationally have been accused of sexual misconduct, including rape, over the past four years, according to statistics disclosed in [a Channel 4 investigation](#). Only 8 percent of them were dismissed. In nearly 60 percent of the cases, no action was taken against the accused. The vast majority of cases, even those in which misconduct has been identified, never result in criminal charges, the investigation found.

Zoë Billingham, a former inspector for an independent watchdog group that reviews policing in Britain, said that while Mr. Couzens's crime was an extreme case, it needed to be seen in a broader context.

"The narrative should not be: 'This was an aberration, this was a one off, he was a bad egg,'" she said. "It should be, 'What we do in policing to stop this misogynistic tolerance of inappropriate behavior?'"

While those engaging in bad behavior make up a small number of officers overall, Ms. Billingham said these cases exist within a culture where officers act with impunity and close ranks when accusations emerge.

Police officials say they have made some progress. The Independent Office for Police Conduct, an external watchdog group, released new data this past week showing that the number of officers facing disciplinary proceedings for abusing their positions for sexual purposes had risen sharply in the past three years.

From 2018 to 2021, 66 officers and members of police staff faced disciplinary proceedings as a result of investigations — 42 of them in the past year alone — and misconduct was proved in 63 of those cases, according to the new figures.

Officials say the increase is a direct result of efforts to tackle this issue and hold those responsible to account. Many sexual misconduct cases are categorized as corruption because of the abuse of power, and they automatically prompt an investigation by the watchdog group. But some police forces were not treating the cases as corruption, so they were not referred to the group.

For victims — like the woman who was mugged — the experience can leave an indelible mark.

The harassment broke her trust in the system, she said. When she found herself in an abusive relationship years later, she said, she was hesitant to call the police.

But in recent years, after observing the #MeToo movement and after much personal growth, she said she felt it was time to report the episode.

Amid increased public scrutiny, local and national police and oversight bodies have taken some measures to address the concerns. The Home Office, the government office responsible for policing, [announced an inquiry into issues raised by the killing of Sarah Everard](#).

London's Police Department, which did not respond to a request for comment, has announced [its own independent review of standards and practices](#), and it plans to increase the number of investigators looking into police abuse. It also plans to create a dedicated team to investigate accusations of sexual misconduct and domestic abuse.

The National Police Chiefs' Council has directed Britain's police chiefs to review all allegations of sexual misconduct, indecent exposure and domestic abuse involving officers over the past two years.

Some former officers have been vocal proponents of a zero-tolerance approach to sexual misconduct and believe officers should be immediately fired after an investigation confirms their guilt.

Janet Hills, a recently retired detective sergeant who served in the Metropolitan Police for three decades and was also the president of the National Black Police Association, said transparency was key.

"They need to call it out and be very blatant and clear," she said, "no slap on the wrist."

She said that in her experience, the internal misconduct procedures were broken because they called for the police to investigate their peers, thus discouraging whistle-blowers from reporting.

"We are being asked to mark our own homework," she said.

Those within the force who have tried to call out bad behavior have often run into roadblocks. Paige Kimberley, a former longtime officer, was denied a consulting job with the police after reporting [vulgar, sexist and abusive messages in a WhatsApp group](#) with male colleagues. She won an employment action this month against the London police.

	<p>Ms. Kimberley’s lawyer, Terry Falcão, who is also a former police officer, said the case was reflective of a broader “boys club” culture. “They treated this like it was nothing,” he said.</p> <p>Sue Fish, the former chief of Nottinghamshire Police, who has spoken about her own experiences of sexual assault by colleagues, said she had been inundated with messages from current and former officers who tried to blow the whistle. Some have seen investigations turn on them amid a defensive and insular culture.</p> <p>“British policing is brilliant at so many things,” Ms. Fish said. “But it systemically fails women and girls, it systemically fails people internally, and it systemically fails marginalized or minority communities.”</p> <p>Ms. Fish said consistent leadership was needed to identify and root out the misogyny at the core of the issue.</p> <p>“Some of their narrative has been that Couzens was a bad apple and he is rotting the barrel,” she said. But in fact, she added, “there is a lot of bad in the barrel” that keeps good officers down and can enable predators.</p> <p>“So actually,” she said, “the key issue is the barrel.”</p>
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HEADLINE	10/31 Mexico journalist killed; 2nd slain in week
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/mexican-journalist-dies-wounds-2nd-slain-week-80893722
GIST	<p>MEXICO CITY -- Photojournalist Alfredo Cardoso died in a hospital Sunday two days after being shot in Acapulco, the second Mexican journalist to be killed during the week, a international journalism group said.</p> <p>Jan Albert Hootsen, Mexico’s representative for the Committee to Protect Journalists, reported Cardoso's death, saying he had direct confirmation from Cardoso’s family.</p> <p>Prosecutors in Acapulco said Friday that Cardoso, who worked for a news portal, had been found sitting on a city street with gunshot wounds and was taken to a hospital. According to the National Union of Press Editors and information from the family relayed by CPJ, Cardoso had been taken from his home earlier Friday by armed men.</p> <p>On Thursday, reporter Fredy López Arévalo, who contributed to several local, national and foreign media outlets, was shot to death when he arrived at his home in San Cristobal de las Casas in Chiapas state.</p> <p>During the first three years of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's administration, 47 journalists and 94 human rights defenders have been slain in Mexico, according to data offered in early October by the the undersecretary of human rights, population and migration, Alejandro Encinas.</p> <p>Mexico is the most violent country in the Western Hemisphere for journalism, according to CPJ, a New York-based press protection group.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/31 Tokyo: man in costume stabs 10 on train
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/man-knife-stabs-10-tokyo-train-starts-fire-80886470
GIST	<p>TOKYO -- A man dressed in a Joker costume and brandishing a knife stabbed at least one passenger on a Tokyo commuter train before starting a fire, injuring passengers and sending people scrambling to escape and jumping from windows, police and witnesses said.</p> <p>The Tokyo Fire Department said 17 passengers were injured, including three seriously. Not all of them were stabbed and most of the other injuries were not serious, the fire department said.</p>

The attacker, whom police identified as 24-year-old Kyota Hattori, was arrested on the spot after Sunday's attack and was being investigated on suspicion of attempted murder, the Tokyo metropolitan police department said Monday.

The attacker, riding an express train headed to Tokyo's Shinjuku station, abruptly took out a knife and stabbed a seated passenger — a man in his 70s — in the right chest, police said. Injury details of other 16 passengers are still being investigated, police said.

Police said he told authorities that he wanted to kill people and get the death penalty. Nippon Television said he also said that he used an earlier train stabbing case as an example.

Witnesses told police that the attacker was wearing a bright outfit — a green shirt, a blue suit and a purple coat — like the Joker villain in Batman comics or someone going to a Halloween event, according to media reports.

A video posted by a witness on social media showed the suspect seated, with his leg crossed and smoking in one of the train cars, presumably after the attack.

Tokyo police officials said the attack happened inside the Keio train near the Kokuryo station.

Television footage showed a number of firefighters, police officials and paramedics rescuing the passengers, many of whom escaped through train windows. In one video, passengers were running from another car that was in flames.

NHK said the suspect, after stabbing passengers, poured a liquid resembling oil from a plastic bottle and set fire, which partially burned seats.

Shunsuke Kimura, who filmed the video, told NHK that he saw passengers desperately running and while he was trying to figure out what happened, he heard an explosive noise and saw smoke wafting. He also jumped from a window but fell on the platform and hurt his shoulder.

“Train doors were closed and we had no idea what was happening, and we jumped from the windows,” Kimura said. “It was horrifying.”

The attack was the second involving a knife on a Tokyo train in three months.

In August, the day before the Tokyo Olympics closing ceremony, a 36-year-old man stabbed 10 passengers on a commuter train in Tokyo in a random burst of violence. The suspect later told police that he wanted to attack women who looked happy.

While shooting deaths are rare in Japan, the country has had a series of high-profile knife killings in recent years.

In 2019, a man carrying two knives attacked a group of schoolgirls waiting at a bus stop just outside Tokyo, killing two people and injuring 17 before killing himself. In 2018, a man killed a passenger and injuring two others in a knife attack on a bullet train. In 2016, a former employee at a home for the disabled killed 19 people and injured more than 20.

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HEADLINE	10/31 Texas Halloween party shooting: 10 shot
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/texas-halloween-party-shooting-leaves-dead-injured-search/story?id=80886469
GIST	<p>A suspect sought in a shooting at a Texas Halloween party that left one reveler dead and nine others injured surrendered to authorities on Sunday, according to police.</p> <p>The shooting occurred late Saturday night at an event center in Texarkana, a town that straddles the border of Texas and Arkansas, according to a statement Sunday morning from the Texarkana Police Department.</p>

The suspected gunman, identified by police as Keuntae McElroy, 21, from the Arkansas side of Texarkana, turned himself in after investigators obtained an arrest warrant for him on Sunday and launched a search, officials said.

McElroy was booked at the Bi-State Jail in Texarkana on one count of felony aggravated assault. Texarkana police said additional charges are expected to be filed against him on Monday.

The shooting unfolded just before midnight at Octavia's Activity Center, where police said a Halloween party was being attended by "at least a couple hundred" people.

"When they (police officers) got there, they encountered a large number of people running from the building and several inside suffering from gunshot wounds," the police statement reads.

The gunman left the venue in a vehicle, setting off a massive search in eastern Texas.

A 20-year-old man, whose name was not immediately released, was mortally wounded and later pronounced dead at a hospital, police said.

Nine other people wounded in the shooting were taken to Wadley Regional Medical Center and CHRISTUS St. Michael Hospital by ambulance and private vehicles, authorities said. None of them initially appeared to suffer life-threatening injuries, police said.

Officer Shawn Vaughn of the Texarkana Police Department said numerous 911 calls were made, prompting all patrol officers working at the time to respond, while another patrol shift was summoned to handle calls on the street, according to ABC affiliate station [KTBS in Shreveport](#), Louisiana.

"When we got here, I understand there was a large crowd in the parking lot involved in several fights," Vaughn said. "So, we requested assistance from any and everybody that was available."

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HEADLINE	10/31 Halloween party shooting: 12 shot, 2 killed
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/dead-10-injured-backyard-halloween-party-illinois-police/story?id=80890367
GIST	<p>Two people were killed and four were hospitalized with life-threatening injuries after gunfire erupted at a Halloween party in Illinois early Sunday morning, police said.</p> <p>At least a dozen people were shot at the party on Jackson Street in Joliet Township, the Will County Illinois Sheriff's Office said. The incident took place around 12:39 a.m. at the backyard of a house where 200 people had gathered to celebrate Halloween.</p> <p>The deadly shooting took place outside the residence, near a DJ booth that was set up in the backyard, according to police.</p> <p>The shots came "from an elevated position on a porch looking down over the crowd," the sheriff's office said.</p> <p>"Everyone was there having fun, and all of a sudden as we're dancing on the back patio, shots started going off from the porch," a witness told ABC's Chicago affiliate, WLS.</p> <p>A patrol officer who was nearby responded to the gunshots, and soon, other officers and first responders arrived, the sheriff's office said.</p> <p>While first responders were assisting victims, they heard additional shots in the area, according to investigators.</p> <p>The two deceased victims, who haven't been immediately identified, died at the scene, police said.</p>

	The investigation is ongoing but the police said witnesses described at least two shooters.
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HEADLINE	10/31 Off-duty officer shot in attempted burglary
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/crime/puyallup-police-say-off-duty-officer-shot-during-attempted-tractor-store-burglary/
GIST	<p>An off-duty Federal Way police officer is expected to survive after being shot in the abdomen during what police said Sunday was an attempted burglary of a tractor dealership.</p> <p>The officer “appears to have been trying to stop a burglary in progress” shortly after 7 a.m., Puyallup police said in a statement. A spokesperson later confirmed that the alleged burglary was at tractor dealership Jennings Equipment on River Road in Puyallup.</p> <p>A Puyallup Police spokesperson said the off-duty Federal Way officer was out for a jog when the officer spotted two men attempting to “pull the doors off the business and make entry,” Puyallup Police Chief Scott Engle said in a news conference Sunday morning. The officer was shot while standing on the sidewalk, Engle said.</p> <p>The officer was transported to a hospital where he underwent surgery on “life-threatening” injuries, police said.</p> <p>Police are searching for two suspects they believe to be involved in the shooting and burglary, as well as two pickup trucks — a light-colored four-door Chevrolet with a missing or down tailgate, and a black truck — that were observed leaving the scene.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/30 Frequency violent threats on Capitol Hill
SOURCE	https://www.stamfordadvocate.com/news/article/Frequency-of-violent-threats-on-Capitol-Hill-16576979.php
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON - It was her first bomb scare on the job, and yet the work day Wednesday seemed to transpire just like any other.</p> <p>That was what felt so eerie about it to Sasha Galbreath, who had just started working for Rep. David Trone, D-Md., about a month earlier.</p> <p>The alerts from the U.S. Capitol Police that cropped up in the bottom right-hand corner of her computer screen notified federal employees of a bomb threat at the Health and Human Services building across from Capitol grounds. Evacuated employees were streaming out of the HHS building, and then another building, and then another. She asked her colleagues, especially those who were present during the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol, if they were OK, if maybe they wanted to go home.</p> <p>"Across the board, the answer was no - this seems like any other day," Galbreath said on Wednesday. "Which in my opinion is unequivocally the most jarring aspect of what transpired this morning."</p> <p>Since Jan. 6, evacuation orders and violent threats on the streets of Capitol Hill have unfolded with unsettling regularity. Even as many have turned out to be false alarms, the specter of political violence still hangs heavy with each alert, generating reminders of Jan. 6 and sending the city into a constant state of hypervigilance - much like it was in the weeks after 9/11 when residents feared another terrorist attack.</p> <p>On the other hand, the relative regularity of the threats has also normalized them, staffers said, making them seem to be increasingly just part of life on the Hill. On the other hand, the relative regularity of the threats has also made them seem to be increasingly just part of life on the Hill, staffers said.</p> <p>So far this year, there have been around 70 bomb threats in the nation's capital, according to the D.C. Office of Unified Communications. In the past 10 days alone, there was a bomb threat at the Department</p>

of Labor and a suspicious package sent to Rep. Ilhan Omar, D-Minn. In August, a man parked his truck near the Capitol and threatened to destroy two blocks of Washington with an explosive device. In April numerous buildings on Capitol grounds were placed on lockdown after a man rammed into a Capitol Police barricade, killing one officer, and in March a House office building was evacuated due to a suspicious package.

The latest scare to the Hill community came Wednesday morning, when the Federal Protective Service received a potential bomb threat directed at the Department of Health and Human Services headquarters. The threat prompted an evacuation of that building, the U.S. Botanic Garden and the nearby O'Neill House Office Building. A day-care center in the O'Neill building relocated to the Ford House Office Building cafeteria, sending a notice to parents that they would need to walk via Virginia Avenue if they wanted to pick up their children.

Authorities issued the "all clear" by early afternoon Wednesday after Capitol Police and D.C. police had descended on the scene to help the Federal Protective Service "investigate the suspicious package" at the HHS building. A spokesperson for Capitol Police said his force assisted with road closures and evacuated our nearby buildings in "an abundance of caution."

By Friday evening, no one had been arrested in connection with the threat.

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HEADLINE	10/30 Seattle police probe Magnolia shooting
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/seattle-police-investigating-magnolia-homicide
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Seattle Police are investigating a homicide after a man was found shot to death in a parking lot in Magnolia.</p> <p>Seattle Police say a woman flagged down police just before 3:30 a.m. Saturday to report an unresponsive man in a parking lot near West Bertona Street and Gilman Ave West.</p> <p>Seattle Fire medics found a gunshot wound on the man. He was declared dead at the scene.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/30 City bans low-level traffic violation stops
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2021/10/30/us/philadelphia-driving-equality-bill/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)When Philadelphia's mayor signs landmark legislation as soon as this week, the city will become the first major US city to ban police from stopping drivers for low-level traffic violations -- stops that studies show target Black drivers at disproportionately higher rates.</p> <p>The Driving Equality Bill, passed 14-2 by the city council on October 14, categorizes certain motor vehicle code violations as "primary violations," which allow officers to pull people over in the name of public safety, and "secondary violations" that don't meet the criteria for a lawful traffic stop, according to the office of Councilmember Isaiah Thomas, who authored the bill.</p> <p>The bill will take effect 120 days after Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney signs it into law, which his office said he intends to do.</p> <p>While Philadelphia is the largest city to ban such traffic stops, some local and state governments have also enacted similar policies.</p> <p>In September, Ramsey County, Minnesota, announced prosecutors will no longer pursue cases against people who are unfairly targeted and detained during non-public safety stops. The new policy comes five years after former St. Anthony Police Department officer Jeronimo Yanez fatally shot Philando Castile seven times during a traffic stop in 2016 over a broken tail light, prosecutors said.</p>

In Minneapolis, [Mayor Jacob Frey](#) announced in August that the city's police officers will no longer conduct pretextual traffic stops for low-level offenses as part of his 2022 budget proposal. Officers are prohibited from making pretextual stops for "expired tabs, an item dangling from a mirror, or an expired license," [according to a city news release](#).

In March, Virginia became the first state to prohibit these stops within three months of the bill's introduction. Law enforcement officers cannot lawfully stop motorists for driving without a light illuminating a license plate, without brake lights or a high mount stop light, and with certain sun-shading materials and tinting films, according to the legislation.

"The bill also provides that no law-enforcement officer may lawfully stop, search, or seize any person, place, or thing solely on the basis of the odor of marijuana," the Virginia bill states.

The police department is on board

[Dennis Jay Kenney](#), a professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, told CNN that there are "risks in both directions" in allowing police to make traffic stops for minor violations and prohibiting them altogether.

"The danger of not eliminating them is that it drives a wedge between the public and the police," Kenney said. "If you're tired of driving while Black, you're less likely to cooperate during these stops."

"The risk in the other direction, in the case of traffic safety, is that we prohibit some behavior and require you to have taillights because it's safer, people can more readily stop behind you. So, by saying these violations no longer matter, then to the extent that they impact public safety, then public safety will be negatively impacted," Kenney added.

Kenney said Philadelphia has decided that pretextual stops are disruptive and the risk to the relationship between the police and the community "is greater than the likely pay off of getting a bad guy every now and then."

Once the Driving Equality Bill is signed into law, the Philadelphia police will work on directive amendments and necessary training. Max Weisman, a spokesperson for Councilmember Thomas, said the police department has exhibited support for the bill and has negotiated in "good faith."

The bill was informed by the development of the Bailey pilot program, a result of the 2011 settlement agreement of [Bailey v. City of Philadelphia](#), which requires the police department to collect data on all stop-and-frisks and store it in an electronic database. The lawsuit alleged that thousands of people in Philadelphia are illegally stopped, frisked and detained by police officers.

Low-level offenses such as registration plate and bumper issues will now be categorized as secondary offenses, which bar officers from conducting traffic stops, unless there is an additional high-level safety violation, according to the Philadelphia police department.

"We believe this is a fair and balanced approach to addressing racial disparity without compromising public safety," the department said in a statement. "This modified enforcement model for car stops furthers the Department's priority of addressing the issue of racial disparity in the Department's investigative stops and complements the Department's efforts to address these same issues in pedestrian stops."

'A traffic stop is a rite of passage'

Councilmember Thomas introduced the bill with nine cosponsors in October 2020, aiming to address "the tension between police and community members by removing negative interactions," according to his office.

"I am humbled by every person who told my office of the humiliation and trauma experienced in some of these traffic stops," Thomas said. "To many people who look like me, a traffic stop is a rite of passage --

we pick out cars, we determine routes, we plan our social interactions around the fact that it is likely that we will be pulled over by police."

The legislation is also part of a package including his [companion bill](#) that mandates a public, searchable database of traffic stops that will be published monthly. The police department will be required to compile digital records of which officers conduct traffic stops, who was stopped, the reason for the stop, and other data that will be included in the database.

"These bills end the traffic stops that promote discrimination while keeping the traffic stops that promote public safety," his office said in a press release. "This approach seeks to redirect police time and resources towards keeping Philadelphians safe while removing negative interactions that widen the divide and perpetuate mistrust."

The new legislation does not change the motor vehicle code that drivers are legally required to follow, but those who commit minor infractions now only receive a warning or citation by mail.

The bill only removes the enforcement mechanism of a traffic stop, according to Weisman. It designates seven secondary violations that prohibit traffic stops, including bumper issues, minor obstructions, broken lights, and a license plate that is not visible or clearly displayed.

Minor infractions such as broken taillights, the smell of marijuana, improperly displayed registration stickers or hanging items from a car's rearview mirror have been criticized as a pretext for racially motivated traffic stops.

Black drivers, which comprise 48% of Philadelphia's population, accounted for 72% of the nearly 310,000 traffic stops by police officers between October 2018 and September 2019, according to data from the Defender Association of Philadelphia. As of this year, Black drivers account for 67% of stops compared to just 12% of White drivers, the data shows.

[Alan Tauber, the acting chief defender for the Defender Association for Philadelphia](#), said the legislation is a "great first step to building more trust between our police and communities of color," adding, "We're hopeful that passage of the Driving Equality Bill is just the beginning of informed and meaningful conversations about positive changes to our justice system that will benefit all Philadelphians."

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HEADLINE	10/29 Pierce Co. sheriff charged w/false statement
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/tacoma/pierce-county-sheriff-not-guilty-plea-ed-troyer-washington-attorney-general/281-d98f1941-f77f-47c8-84e2-a0b04dd47a42
GIST	<p>Pierce County Sheriff Ed Troyer pleaded not guilty to one charge of false reporting and one charge of making a false or misleading statement to a public servant following a confrontation with a Black newspaper carrier in January.</p> <p>Troyer was formally charged by the Washington State Attorney General's Office following a months-long investigation requested by Gov. Jay Inslee after public outcry.</p> <p>Probable cause documents describe Troyer following a Black newspaper carrier, Sedrick Altheimer, along his delivery route, accusing him of being a "porch pirate."</p> <p>Troyer called a department line used by law enforcement to gather routine information and requests and said multiple times that Altheimer threatened to kill him, according to documents.</p> <p>Because of Troyer's call, more than 40 officers rushed to his location. Troyer told the dispatcher Altheimer would not let him leave, and Altheimer was pushing against his car, initially stating he was blocked in.</p>

When Tacoma police officers arrived on scene, they assessed that the call was not a high priority and told dispatch to send only one more police unit.

Alzheimer told officers he was the one being followed and that he was working. He continuously denied threatening Troyer and asked if he could return to work, according to documents.

During Ferguson's investigation, officers said Troyer told them Alzheimer did not make any threats and he did not observe any weapons on him.

One Tacoma officer told dispatch shortly after arriving at the scene and speaking with Alzheimer and Troyer that there was no apparent crime.

Ferguson's office tried to interview Troyer about the incident, but he declined multiple times.

If convicted of a felony or crime involving malfeasance in office, Troyer could be barred from office, according to the report.

Alzheimer has also [filed a \\$5 million tort claim](#) over the incident against Pierce County. The claim alleges that the incident violated Alzheimer's constitutional rights and caused him "severe emotional distress."

An investigation commissioned by the Pierce County Council, conducted by former US Attorney Brian Moran, found Troyer's conduct [violated several of the Pierce County Sheriff's Department policies and standards](#).

The [investigation found](#) he "put others at risk and fell short of meeting the public's -- and the department's -- expectations."

The Pierce County Prosecutor added Troyer to a list of recurring witnesses with "potential impeachment information."

Troyer's attorney released a statement saying he "did not lie or make a false statement," and he was "looking forward to a jury trial."

"We are confident that after the people hear the whole story, Sheriff Troyer will be vindicated," the statement read.

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HEADLINE	10/29 'Bored' Tacoma arsonist: six fires 2 days
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/operation-crime-justice/bored-tacoma-arson-suspect-accused-of-setting-a-half-dozen-fires-over-two-days
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. -- A man accused in a string of fires in Tacoma that investigators say was deliberately set earlier this week pleaded not guilty Friday to arson charges.</p> <p>Cameron Prater, 20, is facing charges in connection with a half-dozen blazes. He is expected to return to court on Nov. 22.</p> <p>Prater was being held Friday on \$1 million bail at the Pierce County Jail after being arrested Thursday at his home. Investigators have fingered him for several fires, including one at St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church on Tacoma's North End.</p> <p>The church was gutted last Sunday, forcing its leaders to cancel morning Mass services.</p> <p>"We prayed for him this morning at church," Father Mike McDermott said Friday about the suspect. "Even when you forgive somebody there are consequences."</p> <p>Investigators said between Oct. 23-25, Prater targeted six locations within a half-mile radius, including:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trying to burn down a parked trailer in a back yard. • Setting fire to several car garages. • Starting a blaze at a Kinder Care and other businesses like the Contract Furnishings Mart. • Intentionally setting a fire at a Tacoma middle school. <p>“It was good that the door was metal and the building is brick,” said Tom Quinlan, who works at the furniture store.</p> <p>Investigators said the deliberately set fires left hundreds of thousands of dollars in damage, although no one was injured.</p> <p>Police launched a thorough investigation to find the suspect.</p> <p>Our “officer followed up, canvassed the neighborhood (and) collected videos,” said Tacoma Police Department Officer Wendy Haddow.</p> <p>According to court documents, Prater admitted to setting the fires. When police asked why, he said he was bored and thought it would be, "cool and fun."</p> <p>“Obviously he needs some help,” Father McDermott said, adding that his church's building is now a total loss but the congregation is planning to rebuild. “We were able to save our important documents. I'm certainly hopeful whatever we are going to do will turn out to be better.”</p>
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HEADLINE	10/29 Tacoma police arrest mass shooter suspect
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/tacoma-police-arrest-suspect-wanted-in-connection-to-last-weeks-quadruple-homicide
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. - Tacoma police have arrested a suspect wanted in connection to a shooting that left four people dead last week.</p> <p>Officers were called to reports of a shooting around 4:30 p.m. in the area of Everett Ave. and E. 42nd St. on Oct. 21.</p> <p>Tacoma Police said two women and a man were killed. A fourth person, a man, later died at the hospital. The shooting happened on the city’s Eastside in the Salishan neighborhood.</p> <p>Police spokesperson Wendy Haddow said the shooting happened in an alley behind a residence at about 4:24 p.m. and that at least one victim was found in the street in front of the residence.</p> <p>It was unclear what led to the shooting. Police identified the victims on Friday as men ages 22 and 19, and women ages 42 and 22.</p> <p>On Oct. 29, Tacoma police and the SWAT team served a warrant at a house in Tacoma, taking a 22-year-old male suspect into custody.</p> <p>The man has been booked into the Pierce County Jail on four counts of first-degree murder.</p> <p>There have been 27 homicides in Tacoma this year, Haddow said. The city has a population of about 212,000.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/29 Man shot, killed in Renton shopping area
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/crime/man-killed-in-shooting-in-renton-shopping-area/
GIST	Renton police are investigating the fatal shooting of a man at a small shopping center Friday night.

	<p>The man was possibly involved in a dispute shortly before he was shot around 7 p.m. in the 4300 block of Northeast Fourth Street, a Renton police spokesperson said on Twitter. The man died about 50 minutes later.</p> <p>The shooter apparently fled the scene in a vehicle before police arrived. A photo posted by police on Twitter showed crime scene tape strung up in the parking lot outside a Safeway.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/29 Airline passenger charged, fined for assault
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/crime/passenger-on-seattle-bound-flight-charged-with-federal-crimes-fined-52000-over-assault-of-crew/
GIST	<p>A man who allegedly punched a flight attendant in the face, tried to open the cockpit door, broke free of restraints and again punched the same flight attendant has been charged with two federal crimes.</p> <p>Ryan Cajimat, 21, of Hawaii was on a Delta Air Lines flight 478 from Honolulu to Seattle on Dec. 24 when he “became disruptive,” according to a statement from the U.S. Department of Justice.</p> <p>He tried to open the cockpit door and then fought with flight attendants as they tried to stop him — punching, pushing and charging one, prosecutors said in court documents filed this week in United States District Court for the Western District of Washington. According to records filed in the case and public reports, Cajimat became disruptive about two hours before the plane was scheduled to land at Sea-Tac International Airport.</p> <p>Cajimat was restrained in plastic handcuffs with the help of another passenger, then broke free and punched the same attendant he’d hit before, according to the Federal Aviation Administration. He was restrained for the rest of the flight and removed from the plane on arrival in Seattle, according to the DOJ.</p> <p>He has also been banned from Delta Air Lines, according to the DOJ.</p> <p>The Federal Aviation Administration issued him a \$52,500 fine, the largest since the agency announced in January that it would take a more aggressive action against passengers who refused to follow crew members’ instructions on commercial aircraft.</p> <p>Federal law prohibits individuals from interfering or physically assaulting aircraft crew or others on the aircraft. Those found in violation receive enforcement letters from the FAA and have 30 days to respond to the allegations.</p> <p>Cajimat is charged with interference with flight crew members and attendants and assault within a special aircraft jurisdiction of the United States.</p> <p>Interference is punishable by up to 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. Assault on an aircraft is punishable by up to one year in prison and a \$100,000 fine.</p> <p>The charges are among the most recent filed by federal prosecutors across the nation amid a surge of reports about unruly passengers.</p>
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